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DUNGEON™

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

ISSUE NO. 163

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By Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

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Step Up to the Paragon Plate

The last couple of weeks were pretty good in my personal D&D land. Not only am I still firmly committed to my New Year's resolution, I'm blowing it out of the water. I'm not only playing fulltime in my regular Wednesday game and running my Tuesday game, I'm now also playing James Wyatt's Friday Greenbriar campaign. He was a little worried at first that because I've read all the Dungeoncraft columns I'd know everything he had planned for us. Little did James know that my brain is a leaky sieve, and I can barely remember what I had for breakfast most days. And since I have the same thing for breakfast most days, that's a pretty sad statement.

In any event, that's not the only big news. This month, our first paragon adventure for *Scales of War* goes live, "Beyond the Mottled Tower." It's a wonderful collaboration by three great designers, and it successfully wraps up a nagging loose end from the heroic tier of the Adventure Path... potentially.

And in our Wednesday game, our characters just hit level 11 a couple weeks back, so I'm getting familiar with the paragon tier as a player as well. It's awesome to be at the height of your power, and more awesome to have the ability to choose your paragon path. I don't know about all of you, but—encouraged by my DM—I took the opportunity to really think about my character's goals and aspirations in the coming levels. Paragon tier is a not only a chance to get some cool new toys, it's also an opportunity to better define your hero, and really define his or her identity.

These two paragon moments got me thinking about the tier in general, and what it means to be playing in a paragon campaign as a DM or player. The paragon tier should feel like a definite step up from your heroic game. In the heroic tier, you're exploring dungeons and righting wrongs on a local level. You're just out of your adventurer training wheels and learning—about what you can accomplish, and about what you can't yet—and getting your feet wet.

But in the paragon tier, I think adventurers, and by extension, adventures, really come into their own. First and foremost, the stakes are higher. No longer are you looking to find the missing blacksmith's son. Now you're concerned about the region-wide slavery ring resulting in disappearances from homes across the land. You aren't worried that snakes have infested a tavern cellar. You're worried that the yuan-ti have subverted the ruler of a city-state, and are using him to promote the widespread worship of Zehir. And it's not just a single city that needs your protection, but the entire valley where you and your companions were born and raised.

You'll see many of these themes echoed in "Beyond the Mottled Tower," as the characters try to stop a villain from destroying all of the Elsir Vale. And as we move forward with more adventures of the paragon tier, you'll see these bigger, more ambitious themes more frequently reflected.

So I hope that, like me, you have the opportunity to run or play in a paragon game in the near future—if not *Scales of War*, something just as fun. We'd love to hear about your stories of paragon adventuring, and how you feel the game changes, for better or worse, at 11th level. Send us your tales to dndinsider@wizards.com.

HEROIC
1–10

House of Pain

A Side Trek for PCs of 8th to 10th Level

by Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

Illustration by Ryan Barger

Cartography by Rob Lee

Your PCs are reaching the upper end of the heroic tier. New worlds are opening up to them—they might have already ventured to the Feywild, for example, and made contacts with inhabitants of that magical plane.

Now they are ready to take their first steps into the darkness.

The Shadowfell awaits . . .

This Side Trek can serve as an introduction to the dangers of the shadow realm. It works well for PCs who are approaching the paragon tier, since it presents a reasonable challenge for characters of 10th level. It is suitable as a climactic encounter for lower-level adventurers, as well.

Adventure Background

Someone has been kidnapping eladrin from settlements in the Feywild. The victims have nothing in common other than race and the misfortune to live in lightly protected dwellings at the edges of habitation. They are ordinary folk, not wealthy or noble, and no ransom demands have been issued. The kidnappings take place at night, and the victims disappear without a trace. None have seen them since.

This time, though, a young member of the family swears she saw "the dark man" walk right through the walls of the house as he escaped the scene. This being clearly has a connection with the Shadowfell, but its motives are as mysterious as ever.

Preliminary investigation with a Consult Mystic Sages ritual suggests that the shadow-dweller emerged from the Underdark, which has openings near several of the villages that suffered abductions. The PCs have ventured into the glittering depths in search of an answer to this mystery. These caverns are the territory of the fomorians and their cyclops servants, who are dangerous enemies but not allies of Shadow as far as the PCs know. Dodging the evil giantkin, the PCs searched the depths for a trace of the kidnapper. Now the PCs stand before a gloomy icon in a threatening grotto.

You can use a number of hooks to get the characters involved in this adventure. The easiest way is to have a friend or relative of an eladrin character be the latest abductee. The ties of blood and family duty alone ought to draw the party into the story. If your PCs are more mercenary, however, they might be induced to seek the answers for a reward. The mission can be a major quest, as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, perhaps with a monetary reward as well.

The party might travel directly from the Feywild, if they have contacts there, or if they are hired by the eladrin authorities. Alternatively, they might find their way to the Feywild Underdark through a passage in the natural world, such as is rumored to lie beneath the Curna Mountains in eastern Faerûn.

You can also drop this location into an existing Feywild Underdark adventure, with or without a related quest.

Adventure Synopsis

Vandariel, a shadar-kai witch who calls herself the Voice of Pain, is a fanatic devotee of the Raven Queen. She has founded and become the self-proclaimed high priest of a bizarre cult, the Lords of Pain, whose purpose is to bring more fey into the shadow pact with that goddess of death. Although the original shadar-kai entered this pact voluntarily, and the race breeds true, Vandariel is consumed by what she sees as a divine mission to reveal the mystery to all fey—whether they wish it or not. Those who do not come voluntarily to the truth are brought against their will. Dark stalkers move like the night, seeking out and abducting suitable subjects.

This adventure consists of two encounters. The first is a hazard, designed to ensure that only the worthy pass. If the characters fail this challenge, they can still proceed but lose the advantage of surprise. The second encounter takes place in the Shadowfell, where the characters confront the cult in its sinister temple.

The Teeth

Encounter Level 10 (2,500 XP)

Setup

This encounter includes the following hazard:

The Teeth (10th-level magic hazard)

If the characters alert the cultists, they also must deal with the following monsters:

2 darkpact shadar-kai warriors (W on the House of Pain Building map)

1 darkpact stalker (S on the House of Pain Building map)

The approach to the Shadowfell portal is protected by a vicious magical hazard. This barrier, known as the Teeth, is intended to slow and weaken intruders as well as to alert the cultists of their approach. Only shadar-kai and creatures who have sworn the pact of the Raven Queen can pass freely. Others must voluntarily inflict pain on themselves or suffer the consequences.

The characters approach from the west. Place them in any squares of the entrance tunnel and the open space to the west of the Teeth.

When the characters first enter the chamber, read:

The tunnel opens into an irregular cavern lit dimly by a strange glow that emanates from the glittering stones. The way forward is nearly blocked by an interlocking array of stalactites and stalagmites, resembling nothing so much as ranks of teeth. The dim light makes features beyond a few feet difficult to make out. In front of the barrier is a small statue of a raven on a pedestal, wings outstretched.

Perception Check

DC 20: *Elven runes are carved into the statue's pedestal, at the foot of the raven figure.*

DC 30: *The dark, shining rock of the statue seems dulled and rough in spots. (A second DC 27 Perception check reveals the presence of dried spatters.)*

When the characters move past the barrier, read:

The chamber rapidly narrows to a recess roughly 10 feet wide. Swirling darkness fills the end of the recess, and a font of dark stone stands nearby.

Tactics

The stalker and the warriors watch through the portal until one or more characters have reached the last row of the Teeth. On its next turn, the stalker takes a move action to pass through the portal, then drops its *dark fog*. The warriors delay their actions if necessary, waiting for the darkness to fall, then move through the portal and make double attacks against characters. (The cultists all enjoy darkvision by virtue of their pact and are not impeded by the darkness.) They attack those who are still squeezing (and who thus grant combat advantage) if possible; otherwise they use *shadow jaunt* to move adjacent to and attack a character in the open space. The darkpact stalker uses *dark step* as often as possible to slice at the characters. The cultists retreat once the darkpact stalker becomes bloodied, or if they run out of maneuvering room.

The characters can take a brief rest after defeating or driving off the cultists.

The Teeth **Level 10 Obstacle**
Hazard XP 2,500

A nearly impenetrable thicket of stalactites and stalagmites blocks the way.

Hazard: This hazard fills the squares indicated on the encounter map. When triggered, the magically infused rocks begin to clash like grinding teeth, attacking characters within the area. The openings between the "teeth" are so tight that Medium and Small characters must squeeze to pass through them.

Perception

DC 27: The character notices old bloodstains on one or more rocky projections.

Additional Skill: Dungeoneering

DC 25: The character senses that the rocks in this area are unusual and show signs of recent movement.

Additional Skill: Religion (a character who worships the Raven Queen gets a +2 bonus to the check)

DC 25: The character recognizes the icon of the Raven Queen as connected to the activation of the hazard.

DC 30: The character understands that an offering of blood at the icon is required to pass the barrier.

Trigger

When a creature enters or begins its turn in a square of the Teeth, the hazard attacks that creature.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee**

Target: Creature in the square that is not shadar-kai or that has not sworn the pact to the Raven Queen.

Attack: +13 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage

Countermeasures

- A character who makes a DC 27 Acrobatics check can move through the hazard at half speed without provoking the attack.
- A character who makes a DC 25 Endurance check takes only half damage from an attack.
- A character can daub the raven icon with his or her own blood (taking 1d4 damage). This stops the clashing of the Teeth and allows that character to squeeze through without attacks. Other characters are still attacked, even if they enter that character's square. Returning through the Teeth requires another offering (at the font beside the portal).

Conclusion

Unless all the characters make a blood offering at the Raven Queen's icon, the cultists in the House of Pain are alerted, effectively making this area a two-stage encounter.

If the cultists are alerted, then the darkpact stalker and shadar-kai warriors in the next area roll initiative and take double moves to their side of the portal. The other inhabitants of the room take up a readied position (see next encounter).

Features of the Area

Illumination: The area is dimly lit. Light sources are partially blocked by the rocky projections, making the far end of the chamber difficult to see clearly.

The Teeth: The characters can destroy these rocky projections by attacking them, although doing so takes considerable time and automatically alerts the cultists in the House of Pain. Each stalactite and stalagmite has the following stats: AC 4, Fortitude 12, Reflex 4; hp 80.

Icon of the Raven Queen: This statue is made of magically reinforced stone. The characters can destroy it (AC 5, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5; hp 60), but doing so automatically alerts the cultists in the House of Pain and removes any possibility of passing the Teeth through a blood offering.

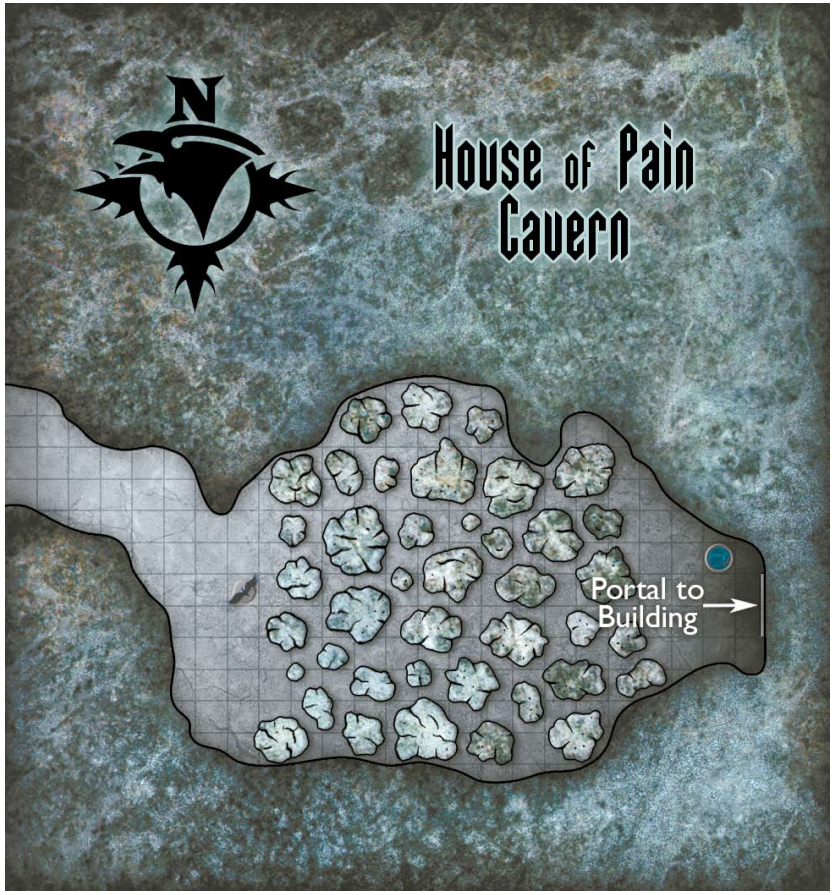
Font: This is a typical temple font of ordinary dark stone, which makes traces of previous blood offerings difficult to detect (DC 32 Perception). It can be destroyed (AC 5, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5; hp 40), but doing so automatically alerts the cultists in the House of Pain and removes any possibility of seeing through the portal.

Portal: The portal to the Shadowfell is a swirling, opaque disk that fills the 10-foot wide passage. It allows passage in one direction only, to the House of Pain on the other side. Return travel is possible only for shadar-kai and cultists who have sworn the pact with the Raven Queen.

The characters can see through the portal with a second blood offering at the font that stands beside it. Doing so deals 1d4 damage, but only one character needs to make the offering. The chamber beyond is dimly lit, but even a character without low-light vision can make out the hulking forms of the cyclops guards.

A second offering at the pool within the House of Pain (see next encounter) is required for anyone other than the cultists and shadar-kai to return.

The portal cannot be attacked or harmed in any way.



Characters can use teleportation powers when moving through the portal, provided they know what is on the other side.

The House of Pain

Encounter Level 11 (3,000 XP)

Setup

3 darkpact cyclops guards (C)
1 darkpact shadar-kai chainfighter (CF)
2 darkpact shadar-kai warriors (W)
1 darkpact stalker (S)
Vandariel, the Voice of Pain (P)
Ritual circle

The House of Pain is a temple for the worship of the Raven Queen, where the Lords of Pain undergo the ritual that bonds them to their dark goddess. The shape of this great hall suggests an outspread raven's wing.

If the characters did not make a blood offering at the icon at the Teeth, then the creatures in this room are prepared. If the cultists have been alerted and the characters have not looked through the portal, the cultists gain a round of surprise against the characters. If the characters bypass the hazard without alerting the cultists and render the portal transparent, they gain a round of surprise on the room's occupants. If they did not make a blood offering at the font to see through the portal, no one is surprised.

When the characters first pass through the portal, read:

Before you is a wide corridor that is lit dimly by a flickering glow from beyond the opening ahead. Cruelly barbed hooks project from the walls every few feet.

The hulking forms of several humanoid creatures block the opening. They are clad in hide armor and heft crude battleaxes, and below each heavy brow glares a single eye.

When a character reaches the opening, read:

This great hall extends more than 50 feet to the east, with sharply angled alcoves. It is dimly lit by a shimmering circle on the floor at the far end and by the glow of a smoking brazier. Beside the brazier, by the circle, stands a gaunt humanoid in tight-fitting garb. Dark flames wreathe her hands. Several black-cloaked humanoids ring the circle.

Perception Check
DC 23: *A fountain to the west is surmounted by a relief carving of a cloaked figure, and you can see that more cruel hooks adorn the walls here.*
DC 28: *At the circle's center is a barred enclosure, in which crouches a huddled figure.*

3 Darkpact Cyclops Guards (C) **Level 11 Minion**
Large fey humanoid XP 150 each

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision, truesight 6
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23
Speed 6

⊕ **Battleaxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Melee 2; +17 vs. AC; 4 damage.

↯ **Evil Eye** (immediate reaction, when a melee attack misses the darkpact cyclops guard; at-will)
The darkpact cyclops guard makes a melee basic attack against the attacker.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Elven
Str 22 (+11) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 11 (+5) **Cha** 11 (+5)
Equipment hide armor, heavy shield, battleaxe

Features of the Area

Illumination: The area is dimly lit. Shadar-kai and the shadow-touched servants of the cult have darkvision and can see without difficulty in this area.

Portal: The portal to the Shadowfell is a swirling, opaque disk that fills the end of the passage. It allows travel only from the cavern of the Teeth to the House of Pain. Return travel is possible only for shadar-kai and cultists who have sworn the pact with the Raven Queen. The portal is also transparent to such creatures.

A blood offering (see the previous encounter) at the fountain within the House of Pain is required for anyone other than the cultists and shadar-kai to return. Such an offering also renders the portal transparent.

The portal cannot be attacked or harmed in any way.

Characters can use teleportation powers when moving through the portal, provided they know what is on the other side.

Wall Spikes: The cultists exploit these cruelly hooked projections to injure and impede their opponents. A creature that is pushed into a square with a wall spike takes 1d6 + the attacker's Strength modi-

Darkpact Shadar-Kai Chainfighter (CF) **Level 6 Skirmisher**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 250

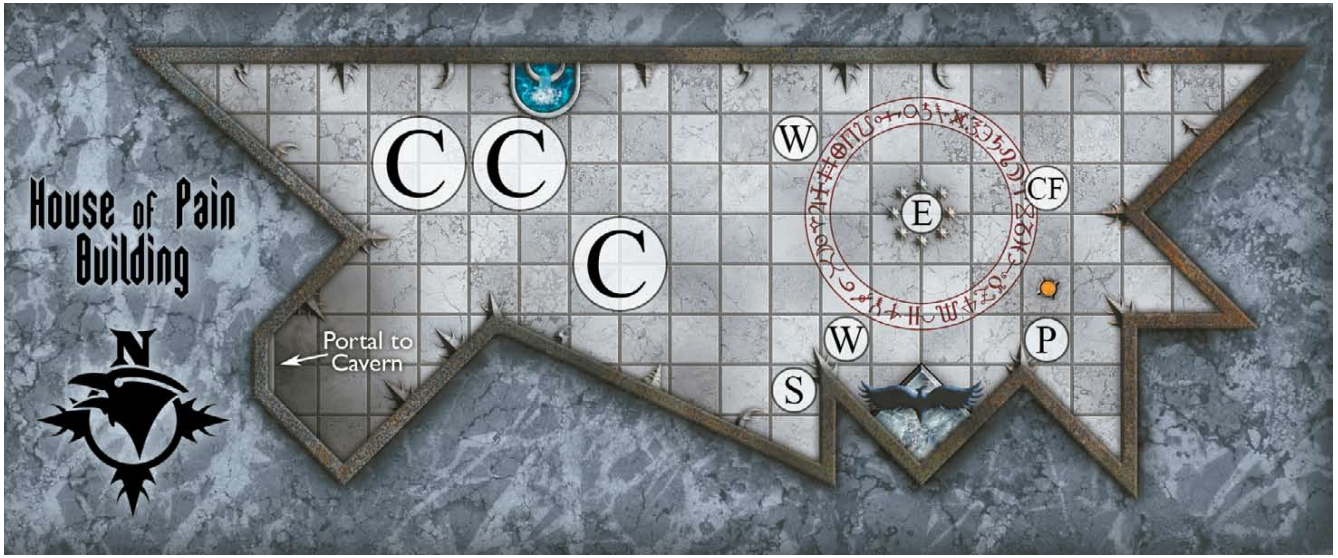
Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
HP 68; **Bloodied** 39
AC 20; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 17
Speed 6; see also *dance of death* and *shadow jaunt*

⊕ **Spiked Chain** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Melee 2; +11 vs. AC; 2d4 + 3 damage.

↯ **Dance of Death** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Necrotic**, **Weapon**
The darkpact shadar-kai chainfighter shifts 6 squares and makes 3 spiked chain attacks at any points during its move. It can attack a given enemy only once, but it deals 1d6 extra necrotic damage with each successful hit.

Shadow Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The darkpact shadar-kai chainfighter teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +14, Stealth +14
Str 17 (+6) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 12 (+4) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 11 (+3)
Equipment leather armor, *+1 magic spiked chain*



fier damage and is immobilized until the end of the attacker's next turn.

Sacred Fountain: This small pool is backed by a relief carving that depicts the cowled figure of the Raven Queen, flanked by ravens in flight. A blood offering here allows return passage through the portal. It also lets the offering character ignore the *aura of pain* (see the Altar entry).

Ritual Circle: The circle is 20 feet across and marked on the floor with mystic runes. Vandariel performed a Magic Circle ritual after bringing her prisoner into the center. Natural creatures of 14th level or below cannot pass through the circle or affect creatures within it. Unaffected creatures can take a standard action to obscure the runes and break the circle.

The cage at the center of the circle is about 5 feet across and made of cold iron bars. The eladrin prisoner is held here. He or she is unharmed physically but is affected by the *aura of pain* in the area, and nearly catatonic with fear. The prisoner does not assist a rescuer in any way but huddles in misery. The cage is locked (DC 25 Thievery to open).

This circle also functions as a permanent teleportation circle for the Linked Circle ritual. It connects to another circle in a temple of the Raven Queen elsewhere in the Shadowfell.

Altar: This is a stone altar topped with the symbol of the Raven Queen. Black candles are lit, and a sacred book is open to the liturgy of the ritual. The altar also anchors a permanent *aura of pain*, which distracts and debilitates enemies. A blood offering at the fountain (see above) allows a character to ignore the aura's effects.

> **Aura of Pain** aura 5; creatures who enter or start their turns within the aura (other than shadar-kai or those who have sworn the pact of the Raven Queen) take a –2 penalty to attack rolls and to Will.

The characters can destroy the altar (AC 4, Fortitude 12, Reflex 4; hp 80). Doing so also ends the aura.

Treasure: In addition to the magic items carried by the cultists, the characters can gather treasure in the form of offerings, ritual accouterments, and the like, totaling 3,000 gp.

The sacred tome is of value to scholars, although the evil ritual scribed in its pages makes it a dangerous object to sell. The Fey Court is willing to pay the party 500 gp to ensure the book's destruction.

Darkpact Shadar-Kai Warrior (W)	**Level 8 Soldier**
Medium shadow humanoid	XP 350
Initiative +11	**Senses** Perception +6; darkvision
HP 86; **Bloodied** 43	
AC 24; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 18	
Speed 5; see also *shadow jaunt*	
⊕ **Katar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+13 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage (crit 1d6 + 9 necrotic).	
⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
The darkpact shadar-kai warrior makes two katar attacks.	
⸸ **Cage of Gloom** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞)	
The darkpact shadar-kai warrior makes a katar attack. If the attack hits, the darkpact shadar-kai warrior makes a secondary attack as strands of shadow coil around the target. *Secondary Attack:* +11 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (save ends).	
Shadow Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**	
The darkpact shadar-kai warrior teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +15, Stealth +19	
Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 14 (+6)	**Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 11 (+4)
Equipment *+1 magic shadowmail,* 2 *+1 lifedrinker katars, amulet of protection +2*	

Vandariel, the Voice of Pain (P) **Level 10 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 1,000
Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
HP 202; **Bloodied** 101
AC 26; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 24
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6; see also *shadow jaunt*
Action Points 1

⊕ **Blackfire Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
+14 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 4 fire and necrotic damage.

Beshadowed Mind (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +14 vs. Will; 2d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target has no line of sight to anything more than 2 squares from it (save ends).

Lance of Dark Faith (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Necrotic**
Ranged 5; +15 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 necrotic damage (crit 2d6 + 12 necrotic), and one ally within sight gains a +2 power bonus to its next attack roll against the target.

Deep Shadow (standard; sustain minor; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
Aura 2; thick, writhing shadows surround Vandariel. She and any other shadow creatures within the aura gain concealment. In addition, enemies that enter or start their turns within the aura take 5 necrotic damage, and enemies (including flying ones) also treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain. Vandariel can sustain the aura as a minor action. However, the effect ends if she uses *shadow jaunt* or moves more than half her speed on her turn.

Blade Barrier (standard; sustain minor; daily) ✦ **Conjuration, Implement**
Area wall 5 within 10; Vandariel conjures a wall of spinning blades that lasts until the end of her next turn. The wall can be 5 squares long and 2 squares high. The squares it occupies are difficult terrain. If a creature enters the barrier's space or starts its turn there, it takes 3d6 + 5 damage and ongoing 5 damage (save ends, with a -2 penalty to the saving throw).

Shadow Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Vandariel teleports 4 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of her next turn.

Healing Word (minor; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Close burst 5; Vandariel or an ally within the area spends a healing surge and regains 2d6 + 3 hit points. Vandariel can use this power twice per encounter, but only once per round.

Raven Queen's Blessing (free, when Vandariel's attack drops an enemy to 0 hit points; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Vandariel or an ally within 5 squares of that enemy can spend a healing surge (with a +3 bonus to the hit points regained).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven, Supernal
Skills Acrobatics +13, Arcana +14, Heal +11, Religion +14, Stealth +15
Str 12 (+6) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 18 (+9)
Con 13 (+6) **Int** 19 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+9)
Equipment *+2 eladrin armor, +2 symbol of despair*

Darkpact Stalker (S) **Level 10 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 500
Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision
HP 81; **Bloodied** 40; see also *killing dark*
AC 24 (see also *dark step*), **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23
Speed 6

⊕ **Scimitar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+15 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage (crit 1d8 + 13).

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +15 vs. AC; 1d4 + 5 damage.

Killing Dark (when reduced to 0 hit points)
Close burst 1; targets enemies; each target is blinded (save ends). When slain, a darkpact stalker explodes in a spout of darkness.

Dark Fog (standard; sustain minor; encounter) ✦ **Zone**
Area burst 4 within 10; creates a zone of darkness that blocks line of sight (creatures with darkvision ignore this effect).

Keen Scimitar (minor; encounter)
Requires scimitar; if the next attack the darkpact stalker makes before the end of its next turn is a hit, treat it as a critical hit.

Combat Advantage
The darkpact stalker deals 2d6 extra damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.

Dark Step (move; at-will)
The darkpact stalker moves 4 squares, gains a +4 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks, and gains combat advantage against any target that it ends its move adjacent to.

Invisibility (minor; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃ ⚂) ✦ **Illusion**
The darkpact stalker becomes invisible until the end of its next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +15, Thievery +15
Str 12 (+6) **Dex** 21 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 14 (+7) **Cha** 19 (+9)
Equipment black feyweave armor, *+1 keen scimitar,* 4 daggers

Tactics

If the cultists are not aware of the characters' approach, they begin the encounter in the indicated positions.

The darkpact cyclops guards attempt to flank the characters but use their reach when possible. Their job is to slow down intruders long enough for the other cultists to respond, so they try to take advantage of cover and any darkness effects to hold out as long as possible.

The darkpact stalker begins by dropping its *dark fog* on a square between the darkpact cyclops guards, cloaking both them and the entrance passage in magical darkness. (The cultists all enjoy darkvision by virtue of their pact and are not impeded by the darkness.) It then uses *dark step* as often as possible, in conjunction with the cyclopses, to set up flanking opportunities and protects itself with *invisibility* if the area of darkness is dispelled.

The darkpact shadar-kai warriors take advantage of the darkness to move up and make double attacks (using *shadow jaunt* if the darkness ends), using *cage of gloom* to restrain dangerous melee foes. The darkpact chainfighter stays in the rear ranks and lashes enemies with its spiked chain until it has an opportunity to use *dance of death*. After dashing through its enemies in this way, it retreats to the cover of darkness.

Vandariel moves into the corner previously occupied by the darkpact stalker. She then uses her *deep*

shadow aura and spends a minor action each round thereafter to sustain it. Each round, she moves to benefit as many allies as possible with the aura's concealment, making sure never to move more than 3 squares in a turn. She uses *beshadowed mind* as often as she can, targeting ranged attackers first. While waiting for that power to recharge, she attacks with her *lance of dark faith*, resorting to *darkfire touch* only if forced into melee. Once it recharges, she uses *beshadowed mind* again, spending an action point if necessary to move to the most advantageous position. She uses *healing word* to restore the darkpact stalker to health once it becomes bloodied. If the battle turns against her, she shifts away from melee attackers and throws up a *blade barrier*. If possible, she moves into the ritual circle; otherwise she retreats into one of the room's sharp angles and blocks it. When facing defeat, she uses *shadow jaunt* to teleport outside the temple's walls and make her escape.

If the cultists have been alerted to the characters, the stalker and the warriors move to intercept them in the chamber of the Teeth as described in the previous encounter. Once the cultists return to this area, Vandariel uses *healing word* to restore some of the stalker's hit points. (She saves her remaining use of *healing word* for herself.) The stalker and the two warriors move behind the cyclops guards and around the corners to avoid being hit by ranged or area attacks and await the intruders.

The central darkpact cyclops guard readies an action to charge the first character who comes through the portal. It attempts a bull rush to push that character into a wall spike. The other cyclopses use their reach to attack the spiked character.

The cultists otherwise follow the tactics described above.

Conclusion

If the characters defeat the cultists, they disrupt the ritual before the prisoner's transformation is complete. They earn the quest reward (if any) by returning the prisoner to his or her village and reporting their findings to the authorities. Their act of heroism puts them in good stead with the Fey Court and can lead to further missions on its behalf.

If Vandariel escaped, the characters have made a dangerous enemy. She devotes herself to bringing them down, using all the resources of her cult to do so. Agents of Shadow might teleport into the characters' haven to assault them, or a party of darkpact fomorians might lay an ambush. Once the characters reach the epic tier, sorrowsworn agents might pursue them. Finding and defeating Vandariel is the only sure way to stop the attacks.

The abandoned House of Pain can make a good base for further exploration of the Shadowfell. Characters might have to create an opening in the walls, use a Wizard's Sight ritual to allow teleportation, or perform a Linked Portal ritual.

About the Author

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Beyond the Mottled Tower

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illustrations by William O'Connor, and Chris Seaman

cartography by Mike Schley

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"All my careful work destroyed by that traitorous bastard Modra and those 'Heroes of Overlook.' Now, I must begin again, seeking new allies on different worlds to make good my losses. But first, some vengeance on the Vale, as well as a way to eradicate all hints of my involvement with the githyanki. After all, anonymity is the key to any successful betrayal. . ."

SCALES OF WAR™

"Beyond the Mottled Tower" is an adventure for five 11th-level characters. By the end of the adventure, the PCs should be midway to 13th level. This adventure is the first paragon adventure for the Scales of War adventure path. "Beyond the Mottled Tower" is the sequel to "The Temple Between," or it can be adapted for use in your own ongoing campaign.

In this adventure, the PCs receive an urgent summons from Overlook's Council of Elders on behalf of Megan Swiftblade, leader of the Freeriders. Answering her call, the PCs witness the near-destruction of the village of Talar. Subsequent revelations propel them on a dangerous hunt for those responsible, before all Elsir Vale suffers the same fate.

BACKGROUND

The shadar-kai arms dealer Sarshan has grown wealthy and powerful through his shadowy dealings. Over many years, Sarshan built up a vast, invisible mercantile empire supplying weapons, intelligence, and mercenaries to anyone with sufficient coin. Sarshan's success (and continued survival) hinged in equal part on his clients' discretion, his duplicitous nature, and his ruthless cunning.

Sarshan is cautious, and his desire for anonymity is such that he has walked away from numerous deals that presented an unacceptably high risk of exposing his operation. However, one of Sarshan's trusted lieutenants, the dark creeper Modra, betrayed his master when he supplied the orc war chief Tusk with arms and equipment for his attack on the folk of the Stonehome Mountains. Tusk's subsequent defeat brought the PCs into direct contact with Sarshan's operation for the first time.

THE QUESTS

In "Beyond the Mottled Tower," the PCs save the village of Talar from Sarshan's attacks, then pursue the shadar-kai to his final lair. There, Sarshan's threat can be ended once and for all.

Minor Quest—Save Talar
When the village of Talar is threatened with utter destruction by a flow of elemental blood chaos, the PCs must find its source beneath the Mottled Tower and eliminate those responsible.
Reward: 600 XP.

Major Quest—Defeat Sarshan
By pursuing the agents attacking Talar, the PCs retrace their route through a vast swamp and finally to Sarshan's new lair in the Elemental Chaos. There, they must run a gauntlet of deadly traps and defenders before finally facing off against the shadar-kai.
Reward: 3,000 XP

Subsequently, in "The Shadow Rift of Umbraforge," the treacherous Modra attempted to slay the PCs. Pursuing their assailant to the Shadowfell, the party discovered the shadar-kai's fortress—the isolated citadel of Umbraforge. Its resultant destruction earned the PCs Sarshan's relentless ire.

In the aftermath, another of Sarshan's schemes was stymied in "The Temple Between." The githyanki war leader General Zithiruun, a valued client and ally of the shadar-kai, was slain attempting to capture Overlook. Sarshan had worked with the disgraced githyanki for some time, funneling troops through the network of portals scattered across Elsir Vale and coordinating the assassination of troublemakers. The relationship was a profitable one for Sarshan, and its loss irked the shadar-kai greatly.

These setbacks have badly damaged Sarshan and his carefully built operation. In an effort to salvage what he can of his power in the world, the shadar-kai has decided to destroy all evidence of his association with the githyanki.

Sarshan has recently become aware that Megan Swiftblade, leader of the Freeriders, has discovered his association with General Zithiruun. Assassins sent by the shadar-kai have attempted to silence the Freeriders, but have succeeded only in forcing Megan to flee to her home village of Talar, near the town of Brindol. There, she has thrown herself on the mercy of an old family friend, the sage Falrinth. As the adventure begins, Sarshan's servants have caught up with Megan and are about to unleash an indiscriminate assault on the village.

Blood Chaos

Blood chaos is a potent acidic distillation of raw elemental essence, first collected and refined from the Elemental Chaos by Djamela, a long-dead efreet conjurer. The efreet created this horrid ooze in the course of experimenting with the fundamental mutability of her home plane, storing it in a vast reservoir in her remote tower home. After Djamela's death, Sarshan discovered the tower and its blood chaos stores. Recognizing the material's potential as a weapon, he claimed the tower as his lair. Now, the shadar-kai forges plans to route the blood chaos by way of portals into Elsir Vale.

This potent distillation of elemental energy burns inanimate objects and melts living flesh. A creature that enters or begins its turn in an area of blood chaos takes 2d6 + 3 acid and fire damage and is slowed (save ends).

Blood chaos at a depth of 3 feet or less is difficult terrain. In deeper areas of blood chaos, creatures must use their swim speed or make a DC 10 Athletics check to move. They gain cover except against attacks from submerged enemies. Fighting in deep blood chaos imposes a –2 penalty to attack rolls except with spears and crossbows. Powers that have the fire keyword take a –2 penalty to attack rolls.

On rare occasions, creatures who suffer exposure to blood chaos undergo horrid physical changes. This foul substance begins to imbue their physical nature with chaotic energy, disfiguring them but granting them powerful abilities.

Adventure Synopsis

Overlook's Council of Elders has received a missive from Megan Swiftblade, begging their aid in the light of repeated assassination attempts against her and her group—the Freeriders. The letter also includes an intriguing note indicating that Megan has discovered who was behind General Zithiruun's recent attack on the city. Megan is in hiding for her life, but asks that a courier be sent to the Green Dragon tavern in the village of Talar. The council summons the PCs, asking them to meet with Megan and assess the truth and value of her information.

The PCs reach Talar without incident, but as they rest in the tavern waiting for Megan to make contact, an earthquake hits the area. However, before they flee the collapsing tavern, the PCs must aid other trapped patrons. When they finally reach the street, the screams of the fleeing populace herald the sight of an unearthly ooze—blood chaos—inundating and destroying nearby buildings.

The PCs face off against several creatures lurking within the blood chaos. However, even as they determine that this deadly flow is emanating from a tunnel blasted out through the side of a nearby hill, the PCs see the tower atop the hill shudder and sink into the earth. In the aftermath, the PCs battle their way down through the tower, defeating a number of beasts freed by the earthquake, and rescuing the sage Falrinth, his servant, and Megan.

In a cavern deep beneath the tower, the PCs discover that servants of Sarshan are behind the attack on the town, and are set to flee by way of a teleportation circle. After defeating them, the PCs glean enough information from Falrinth and Megan to determine that this attack is just the first of many, and that Sarshan must be stopped for good.

After activating the portal, the PCs arrive at the Ever-Tree—a living tower growing in the midst of a lake tainted with blood chaos. Immediately beset by a pair of green dragons, the PCs fight their way into the tunnels beneath the tree, catching their first glimpse of Sarshan as he flees. After defeating Sarshan's guards, the PCs follow the shadar-kai through another portal to the Elemental Chaos.

Arriving atop an earthberg drifting on the Sea of Fire, the PCs discover the monolithic tower that now serves as Sarshan's lair. Inside, the shadar-kai has configured a portal network leading through the tower to pass through a series of guarded and trapped chambers. When they finally reach the roof, the PCs and Sarshan face each other in a final showdown.

Setting

"Beyond the Mottled Tower" plays out in three distinct sections. The adventure opens in the village of Talar moments before an earthquake strikes. Escaping the destruction, the PCs are drawn to the nearby Mottled Tower, home of the sage Falrinth, and the previously secret caves beneath it.

From the tower, the party travels by portal to the Ever-Tree. This huge and ancient oak grows at the center of a lake tainted with blood chaos, and features a series of dank, noisome tunnels through which the PCs pursue Sarshan.

In the end, the PCs travel to the Sea of Fire in the Elemental Chaos, within sight of the black walls of the City of Brass. A floating island houses the obsidian tower in which the climax of the adventure plays out.

Starting the Adventure

To get the adventure moving quickly, read the text below, then proceed to "Part 1: The Green Dragon".

The summons from the Council of Elders was sudden and unannounced. Standing once again in the High Hall, you are told that the Freeriders, led by Megan Swiftblade, have uncovered the identity of a powerful ally to General Zithiruun—an ally who helped prepare the recent attack on Overlook. Megan has since fled to the village of Talar in the face of repeated assassination attempts. In return for the name of the general's mysterious benefactor, she has requested the council's aid.

The council, concerned that this mysterious figure might still have designs on the city, has dispatched you to rescue Megan, eliminate any immediate threat to her safety, and return her to Overlook.

If you prefer a slower start to the adventure, give the players a chance to ease into the action and learn a bit more about recent events. The PCs can receive the Council of Elders' summons while in Overlook or at any location in Elsir Vale. The summons asks the PCs to come to the High Hall. Any characters who participated in "Siege of Bordrin's Watch" (*Dungeon 157*) have visited the hall and spoken with the elders before.

The Council of Elders

In this roleplaying encounter, the PCs learn more about their quest. Read or paraphrase the following, then use the notes below to facilitate play and answer any questions the PCs might have.

Once more, you stand in the High Hall to be greeted by Overlook's elders, though their welcome is less brusque this time.

"Greetings, friends," intones Elder Cadrick as you approach the dais upon which he and the city's other four leaders stand. "We have received a desperate message from Megan Swiftblade, leader of the Freeriders, who you might remember. The Freeriders have discovered that General Zithiruun had a powerful ally in his recent attack on the city. Although she does not identify this ally in her message, Megan has already survived three attempts on her life and fears that more will follow. If we help her, she will tell us who was ultimately behind the attack, hopefully in time to prevent another."

"Again, we find ourselves in need of aid, and again we call upon you. Travel to the village of Talar and find out what Megan knows. Keep her safe, neutralize any immediate threat to her, and then return her to us."

Cadrick and the others know the following additional information.

- The village of Talar, where Megan was born, lies outside the city of Brindol.
- Though Megan does not know who is behind the attacks against her, she believes it to be the ally she is threatening to name.
- Megan's message to the council makes no mention of where she is staying, saying only that they should leave a message for her at the village's Green Dragon tavern.

Getting to Talar

The party's journey from Overlook to the eastern portion of Elsir Vale and the village of Talar is uneventful. If the PCs initially wish to bypass Talar for Brindol, they can resupply and purchase new equipment as you permit.

When the PCs finally reach Talar, read:

The journey to Talar is long but not overly arduous. Just before dusk, you arrive at the village's tavern and inn, the Green Dragon. Having secured rooms for the night and left your message, you take your rest in the dimly lit common room. Megan's message to the council stated that she would contact its emissaries only after making sure you had not been followed. All you can do now is slake your thirst and wait.

The Green Dragon

Allow this roleplaying and scene-setting encounter to run as long as the players are enjoying themselves, using the notes below to facilitate play.

The Green Dragon is a typical two-story village tavern and traveler's inn. Its outer walls are dressed stone, while internal walls and the floor are stout oak boards laid over thick joists. The roof is slate, and a small beer cellar is found under the common room. Inside and outside shutters keep the evening chill at bay.

The common room takes up the majority of the first floor, with a large fireplace opposite the bar filling the area with warmth and light. The walls are covered in faded tapestries showing hunting and woodland scenes. The second floor houses the inn's guests.

The Provender

Rooms are available for 5 sp a night. Bernath the innkeeper can also provide hearty meals (2 sp for stew, thick-cut bread, and boiled vegetables) and ale (2 sp a pitcher). The wine in his cellar is carefully kept for wealthy patrons. Before opening a bottle, however, he demands payment up front (5 gp).

The Folk

Most of the folk in the tavern are villagers relaxing after a hard day's work. A few travelers round out the clientele.

Bernath: The owner of the Green Dragon (male human; Diplomacy +7, Insight +6) is a jovial, portly widower who welcomes one and all to his establishment. However, a DC 10 Insight check reveals that the innkeeper's cheery disposition is a front. Although this might pique the PCs' suspicions, Bernath is simply ill at ease in the presence of armed adventurers. Once he sees to the PCs' room, food, and drink, he avoids them whenever possible.

Bernath and his son Niall are the only people in town who know that Megan is staying with Falrinth at the Mottled Tower. However, Bernath has been well paid by Megan to keep his silence. He plans to secretly deliver the PCs' message later that night.

Niall: Bernath's twelve-year-old son (male human; Thievery +6) is ostensibly in the common room to help his father. In reality, he is a daring, mischievous sort who doesn't think twice about helping himself to a traveler's unattended possessions.

At some point before the earthquake strikes, Niall makes a move to pilfer several silver coins that have fallen unnoticed under Leucis's chair (see below). The PCs and the merchant have a chance to notice (Perception DC 10).

Niall overheard his father talking with Serten (Falrinth's servant) about Megan's presence in the Mottled Tower, though his father does not know that Niall shares his secret.

Leucis: This frail cloth merchant (male tiefling; Bluff +12, Diplomacy +12) is deep in his cups when the PCs arrive. Leucis's business has taken a downturn recently, and when he spies the PCs, he attempts to start a conversation with the not-so-subtle goal of off-loading his wares on the (hopefully) wealthy adventurers.

Sariel: This slim female eladrin carries the weapons and armor of a warrior. She sits on her own, humming a tuneless song while nursing her ale. Though she is polite to anyone conversing with her, she is tightlipped as to her reasons for being in Talar. The other patrons ignore her, often while discussing spurious explanations for her presence.

Though her appearance is likely to arouse suspicion, Sariel is merely a courier for a well-to-do merchant in Brindol. She knows nothing about Megan, but takes any questioning by the PCs as an attempt to shake her down and steal the mundane documents she carries.

Farmers: These hardy humans are relaxing after a hard day's work in the fields. Most sit in small groups drinking and talking quietly among themselves. They are polite and deferential to the PCs, and can provide the following information.

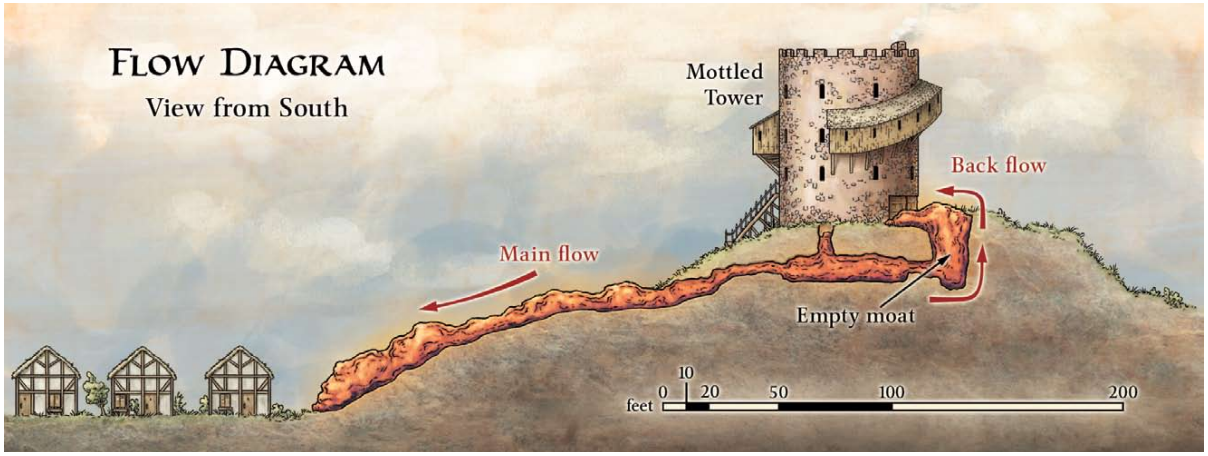
- ✦ Everyone in the village knows of Megan's reputation as an adventurer, and all remember her as a child. However, she hasn't lived in Talar for years.
- ✦ Megan's parents died five years before, and she has no other family in Talar.
- ✦ Megan's father was a good friend of Finrath the sage—or at least as much of a friend as the antisocial sage let him be.

When the players have done as much roleplaying and information gathering in the Green Dragon as they wish, the earthquake strikes.

Skill Challenge: "Walls Come Tumbling Down" (page 22).

In the aftermath of the earthquake, the village lies in ruins. However, Talar's ordeal is far from over.

Tactical Encounter: "Flowing Death" (page 24).



At the Tower

Even as the PCs defeat the creatures that have emerged from the flow of blood chaos through the village, they witness the Mottled Tower sinking into its hill on the edge of town.

The horrid ooze continues to slowly flow through the village, destroying everything it touches. However, sudden movement atop the nearby hill catches your attention. Even as you watch, the mottled tower shudders, then begins to sink into the ground. Two frantic figures—one dragging the other—appear on the rooftop.

As the PCs approach the tower, read:

The tower continues to sink into the earth, so that by the time you reach the crest of the hill, only the roof and its battlements remain above ground. Two figures cling to the slate—one a human male dressed in sage's garb; the other a human female clad in armor, sword in hand. Though the male seems utterly terrified, the woman is defiant despite what appears to be a badly broken leg.

The figures atop the tower are Serten, Falrinth's apprentice, and Megan Swiftblade, leader of the Freeriders.

Serten: This portly human male (Arcana +9) wears an ink-stained robe, now tattered and torn. He is groggy and bleeding from a head wound caused by falling stone.

Megan Swiftblade: Badly injured and covered with dust, this slender human female has short-cropped blond hair. A vicious scar runs from her forehead down her left cheek. If the PCs took part in "Siege of Bordrin's Watch" (*Dungeon 157*) or "The Temple Between" (*Dungeon 161*), they recognize Megan at once.

Crossing the Moat

Although the tower has sunk into the hill, the PCs must still cross the moat to reach the roof. Normally dry, this broad ditch is now filled with blood chaos. However, the collapse of the tower has left huge chunks of stone spread through the moat. Though the blood chaos is slowly eating away at them, these blocks remain solid enough that the PCs can easily cross (no skill checks necessary).

Learning More

The PCs can yell across the moat to Serten and Megan, but initially only Megan responds.

Megan: Although she desperately needs help, Megan is less than happy to see the PCs. She resents them for denying the Freeriders the glory of defeating General Zithiruun. The rest of the Freeriders went into hiding elsewhere in Elsir Vale after the first assassination attempt against them, as the group felt that splitting up would make them less vulnerable.

Megan is anxious to rescue Falrinth, but her broken leg has her trapped. Serten dragged her up to the roof, but the apprentice is now too terrified to move. She fears that escaped monsters have trapped the old sage below. She can identify all three of the monster types once caged in the tower, but she knows nothing of their particular abilities.

Megan does not know who or what is behind the earthquake. Though she suspects that Sarshan is trying to kill her, she does not yet share her knowledge of the shadar-kai with the PCs.

Serten: Serten is terrified, but gentle questioning calms him somewhat. He knows little more than the PCs at this point. He was in his quarters when the earthquake struck, but he has no idea what caused it or where the blood chaos is coming from.

Serten tells how the earthquake released several monsters kept by Falrinth for research purposes. Megan rescued him from these foul creatures, then he returned the favor by dragging her to the roof when a collapsing wall broke her leg. He, too, fears for Falrinth's life.

Mottled Tower Overview

The Mottled Tower once stood within a dry moat atop a low, steep hill on the periphery of the village. Constructed of cut and dressed stone, the tower was in good repair before its collapse. The sage Falrinth lives within, attended by his apprentice.

Features of the Tower

Illumination: Dim light (sun or moonlight filtering through the tower's narrow windows on the fourth floor, a few guttering candles and torches on lower floors).

Wooden Doors: Doors within the tower are not locked. AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 10, 20 hit points.

Walls: The inside walls are of wooden slats over thick posts. AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 12, 40 hit points.

Floors: Worn oaken floorboards over heavy joists make up the floors. AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 12, 40 hit points.

Ceilings: Ceilings are the joists and bare floorboards of the level above, and are 20 feet high. Dust and the sound of footsteps sift down when creatures are moving on the next level.

Spiral Staircase: A wooden spiral staircase climbs the height of the tower, providing access to all levels.

Narrow Windows: Window slits in the stone walls allow dim light into the tower's interior. These windows are shuttered both inside and out. On levels now below the ground, the shutters hold the earth and mud outside at bay.

Mess and Clutter: The earthquake and the tower's subsequent plunge into the hill have caused chaos within. Chairs and tables are overturned, while the contents of cupboards and shelves lie scattered upon the floor.

External Staircase: This covered walkway spirals around the tower, providing access between the second, third, and fourth floors.

Structural Damage: The earthquake has caused extensive damage to the tower. Though the ancient structure is in no danger of collapse, sections of its walls have been badly weakened. Cracks have appeared above all the windows and doors, while stone dust and crumbled mortar cover the floor. Here and there, the massive stone blocks of the walls jut inward from the pressure of the earth outside.

Fifth Floor

The only features of note on this level are the tower's battlements and chimney stack. Megan and Serten have taken refuge here from the raging monsters and the blood chaos below.

Fourth Floor

Falrinth's apprentice Serten slept here, and the sage kept several monsters caged in this area as part of his questionable research. When the PCs reach this level, they discover that these test subjects have escaped. Enraged by their long captivity and their mistreatment at Falrinth's hands, they attack anyone they see.

Tactical Encounter: "Unbound" (page 26).

Third Floor

A library, laboratory, and guest room make up this level. Falrinth does most of his work and research here.

Library: High wooden bookshelves dominate this chamber, their volumes now spread across the floor. An overturned table lies in the middle of the room.

Laboratory: This large chamber is a shambles, with much of the floor covered in shattered laboratory equipment.

Megan's Quarters: Falrinth's guest room sees use only infrequently, as the antisocial sage seldom welcomes visitors. The plainly furnished room shows signs of recent occupation but contains nothing of value.

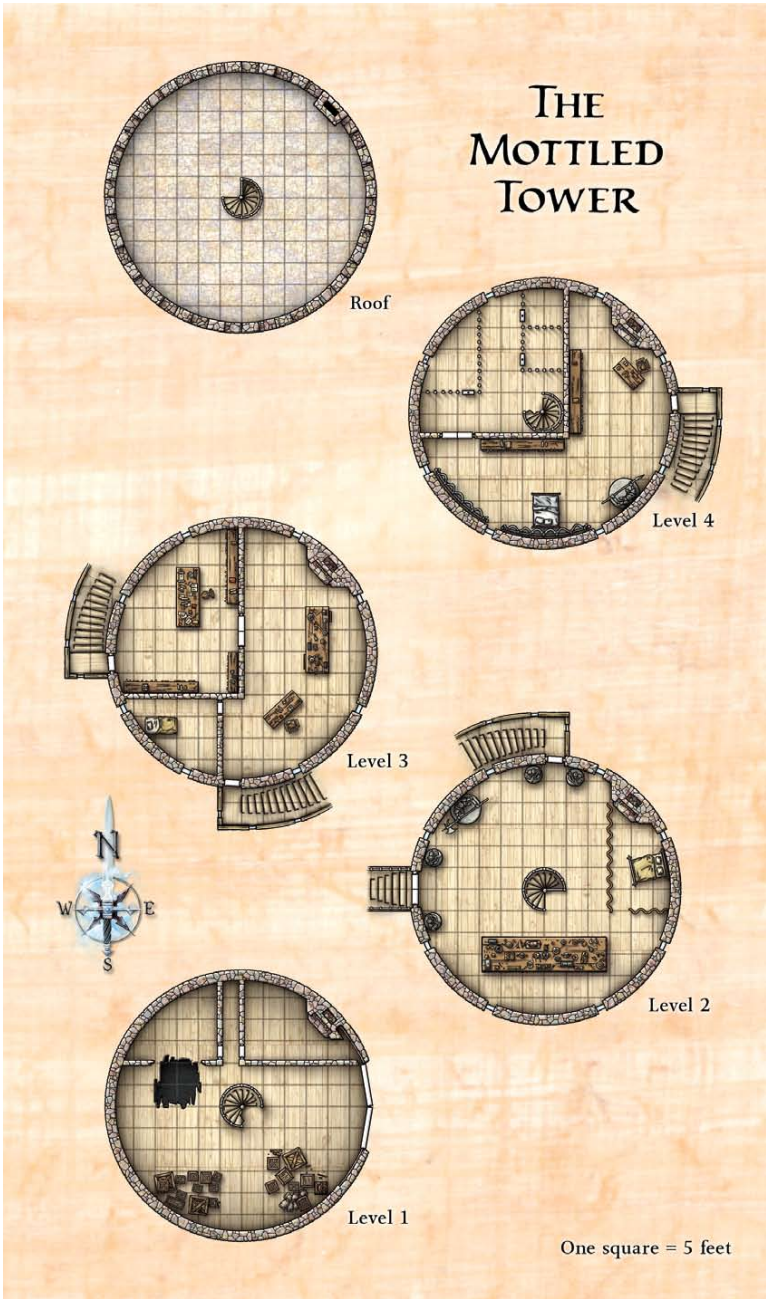
Second Floor

Falrinth uses the second floor as his living space. A curtained-off section holds a four-poster bed, while a large banquet table dominates the rest of the chamber.

First Floor

The tower's ground floor is used mainly for storage, with two smaller chambers set up as a kitchen and pantry. Large sliding doors of iron in the east wall provide access for crates, barrels, and so forth.

Pantry: Shelves once crammed with foodstuffs line the walls of this room, but their contents have joined the boxes, crates, and barrels filling much of the available floor space.



Kitchen: A large fireplace dominates this chamber. Cooking paraphernalia fallen from cupboards and sideboards lies scattered about.

When the PCs reach this area, they discover Falrinth huddled in a corner. Read:

A portly human male huddles within the devastation of this kitchen. His straggly brown hair is disheveled, mud staining his robes.

The reclusive Falrinth is less than grateful to his rescuers, asking only if the PCs have seen Megan and Serten. If the PCs speak to Falrinth (either here or later), refer to the skill challenge "The Chase Is On (Part 1)" (page 30).

Below the Tower

A series of caverns unknown to Falrinth lie beneath the tower. Sarshan's attack squad is using a trio of ancient floodgates within the caves to destroy Talar—the first test of Sarshan's equipment and capability.

Tactical Encounter: "Blood Chaos Caverns" (page 28).

The Chase Is On (Part 1)

In this first part of a connected two-part skill challenge, the PCs obtain information from Megan and Falrinth, then step through a portal to follow the route of Sarshan's servants back to their master.

Skill Challenge: "The Chase Is On (Part 1)" (page 30).

The Ever-Tree

Once the skill challenge is complete, the PCs are ready to use the teleportation circle to follow the route taken by Sarshan's servants. Stepping through the portal takes them to the Ever-Tree, below which Sarshan has created a lair to help him regulate and direct the flow of blood chaos.

Tactical Encounter: "Draconic Wrath (page 31).

The Chase Is On (Part 2)

In this second part of the connected skill challenge, the PCs enter the fetid tunnels below the Ever-Tree in search of Sarshan.

Skill Challenge: "The Chase Is On (Part 2)" (page 33).

Blood Chaos Pools

In the depths of the tunnels beneath the Ever-Tree, Sarshan and his servants funnel a pool of blood chaos into Elsir Vale by way of two ancient portals.

Tactical Encounter: "In Fetid Darkness" (page 34).

The Tower of Djamela

Sarshan's lair and final hiding place lies in the Elemental Chaos—a tower on a floating island set in the midst of the Sea of Fire. After activating the portal through which the shadar-kai fled the "In Fetid Darkness" encounter (page 34), the PCs appear within a permanent teleportation circle on the shore of a floating earthberg. Close by, they see the larger island whose obsidian tower is Sarshan's lair. On the horizon, the distant spires of the legendary City of Brass shimmer above the haze of the lava sea.

The Island

Sarshan's island is a steep-sided rise that juts up from the Sea of Fire. An ancient stone dike surrounds the island, bolstered by arcane rituals that help keep the lava at bay. Environmental conditions on the island are described in the "Sea of Fire" encounter (page 37).

The PCs can learn more about the island with a successful History check.

DC 15: *Years ago, this island was home to an eccentric efreet mage named Djamela. When her dangerous research saw her driven from the City of Brass, Djamela relocated to this remote location to continue her work. The monolithic tower that dominates the island was raised by her hand, and filled with traps and conjured creatures to defend against intrusion.*

DC 20: *Djamela's passion was the study of raw chaos. The mage was particularly interested in the mutability of the matter of the Elemental Chaos, and sought to harness the innate chaotic quality of such matter to effect its controlled change.*

DC 25: *Djamela's enemies eventually found her, and the efreet mage was slain. In the aftermath, the golems and spectral defenders that Djamela had conjured were left to run free, preventing others from continuing Djamela's research. With its dike decaying, the island was nearly consumed by the Sea of Fire.*

Djamela's Tower

The efreet mage's tower is a sheer-sided obsidian monolith. Sarshan has constructed a path leading from his access portal at the edge of the island to the monolith's base. However, the shadar-kai has prepared for unwelcome visitors by reestablishing control over the mage's traps and wards—including a great reservoir of blood chaos in the tower's lower level.

Height: The tower is 200 feet high and constructed of polished obsidian (Athletics DC 30 to climb).

Ceiling: Unless otherwise noted, ceilings within the monolith are 60 feet high. The top level is open to the sky.

Level Access: The monolith contains seven levels, some of which are sunk below the island's surface. However, knowing that the PCs are after him, Sarshan has reconfigured the portals that once provided access between levels. Now, they lead through the chambers where Djamela's most dangerous traps lie in wait.

The End is Nigh

Sarshan's plans involve the shunting of huge amounts of blood chaos between the planes. However, the

shadar-kai's knowledge of Djamela's work is less complete than he thinks. In the course of establishing the portal links between the obsidian tower and the world, Sarshan has inadvertently diverted arcane power from the wards that imbue the island's walls. Now, even as the PCs hunt the shadar-kai, a torrent of lava threatens to breach the dikes. This race against time means that the PCs do not have time to take an extended rest while on the island.

When his work is complete, Sarshan attempts to establish a portal to escape the island. Unfortunately, the breakdown of the wards interferes with his ritual, costing him time that allows the PCs to catch up.

Sea of Fire

The portal takes the PCs to an earthberg floating on a lava sea. Sarshan's tower is nearby, but the party must run a gauntlet laid down by the shadar-kai's guards.

Tactical Encounter: "Sea of Fire" (page 37).

Galleries

Once the PCs have fought their way past the initial wave of defenders, they follow the path to the monolith's well-guarded entrance.

Tactical Encounter: "Galleries" (page 39).

Crusher Rooms

The portal in the galleries leads to a deadly gauntlet of traps and defenders still present from the time of Djamela.

Tactical Encounter: "Crusher Rooms" (page 42).

Final Battle

As Sarshan prepares his final escape, the PCs have one chance to catch the shadar-kai and end his threat to Overlook and Elsir Vale.

Tactical Encounter: "Final Battle" (page 45).

Walls Come Tumbling Down

Encounter Level 11 (3,000 XP)

Setup

An earthquake rocks the village of Talar, threatening to raze the Green Dragon to the ground.

Walls Come Tumbling Down **Level 11**
Skill Challenge XP 3,000

The tavern begins to shudder violently as if in the grip of a powerful storm. Tipped tankards slosh ale to the floor as several patrons are knocked back in their chairs. Window shutters bang wildly as the shaking increases, the floor and walls bucking as if alive. In panic, the other patrons stagger to their feet and attempt to flee the chaos.

The PCs must flee the tavern as it collapses about their heads, but the plight of the trapped and terrified villagers complicates their escape.

Complexity
5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills
Acrobatics, Athletics, Diplomacy, Intimidate.

Other Skills
Acrobatics, Bluff, Perception.

Victory
The PCs manage to escape the tavern and evacuate the patrons trapped within. Consequently, they enter the "Flowing Death" encounter early, giving them additional time to rescue the villager on the trapped wagon before the blood chaos overwhelms her. See page 24 for more information.

Defeat
The PCs are injured beneath the collapsing building or hit by flying debris, though buried characters and villagers can be dug out with a few minutes' work. Each PC loses 1 healing surge.

Special
Some of the timeline events (see below) incur failures or successes in the skill challenge.
If the PCs simply flee the tavern, they automatically fail the skill challenge. To be successful, they must attempt to help other patrons escape.

Acrobatics (DC 10)
(0 successes or failures)
Moving through the collapsing tavern, whether to reach a fallen comrade or to flee, requires a successful Acrobatics check.

Acrobatics (DC 21)
(1 success or failure, see below)
Escaping the collapsing tavern through a door or window requires a successful Acrobatics check. This check allows the PC to drag one other person with him or her. A PC can make this check only once for himself, but he can make the check again if he goes back into the tavern to rescue one of the villagers.

Athletics (DC 16)
(1 success or failure, see below)
Different events in the skill challenge key to specific Athletics checks the PCs can attempt. See the event descriptions below.

Bluff (DC 16)
(0 successes or failures)
With a successful check, the PC manages to convince a terrified villager to accept his or her aid. The PC gains a +2 bonus to his or her next Diplomacy or Intimidate check with the same NPC.

Diplomacy or Intimidate (DC 16)
(1 success or failure)
With a successful check, the PC manages to convince—or threaten—one of the terrified villagers into leaving a place of refuge within the tavern. The villager subsequently escapes the tavern.

Perception (DC 10)
(0 successes or failures)
The PC notices something of importance in the tavern, whether a villager trapped beneath a table (see "Trapped Villager," below), parts of the floor or ceiling about to collapse (see "Roof Collapse" and "Crumbling Floor"), and so on. This check serves as the lead-in to one of the events detailed below.

Timeline of Events

Once the earthquake strikes, the action develops quickly. This skill challenge takes place over 6 rounds, during which a number of specific events unfold. Some events occur at specific times, while others are triggered by the PCs' actions. The PCs dictate in which order they tackle these additional events.

Round 0: The earthquake hits the village; the skill challenge begins.

Round 1: "Leucis."

Round 2: "Crumbling Floor."

Round 3: "Fire."

Round 4: If the "Fire" event was not resolved, a tapestry bursts into flames.

Round 5: If the "Fire" event was not resolved, fire spreads to the adjacent tapestries.

Round 6: "Roof Collapse."

Round 7: The tavern collapses. Any PCs remaining inside are trapped beneath the rubble.

The events of the skill challenge are presented in the order in which they occur, followed by events triggered by the PCs.

Leucis

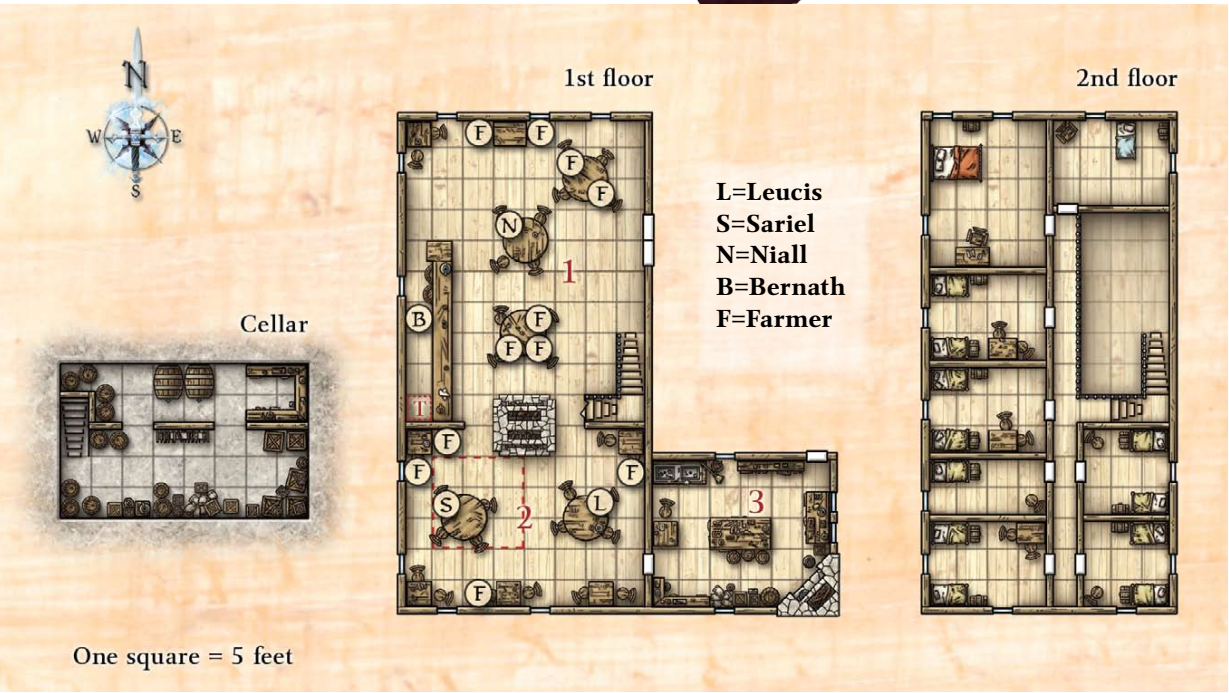
When the earthquake hits, the merchant Leucis is struck by a roof beam that knocks him unconscious. Unless he is rendered conscious with healing or hauled out, he dies when the roof collapses.

Crumbling Floor

A section of floor gives way, dropping characters into the cellar below.

The floor groans ominously as its planks and timbers begin to twist and splinter.

The collapsing floor makes a melee attack against each character in the area: +15 vs. Reflex; 1d10 falling damage, and the target lands prone in the cellar amid a shower of debris. The party earns 1 failure if any of the PCs fall into the cellar.



Fire

A fire in the common room spreads quickly unless it is extinguished.

A particularly violent tremor shakes the inn, hurling a shower of burning hot embers from the fireplace into the common room. A tapestry torn from the wall by a fleeing patron quickly begins to smolder.

If the PCs do not deal with the smoldering tapestry, it bursts into flames the following round. Those flames then spread to the adjacent tapestries the round after. With a successful Athletics check, a PC can smother or beat out the flames in the first or second round. This earns 1 success in the skill challenge. If the PCs fail to put out the flames, they earn 1 failure in the challenge.

Roof Collapse

The Green Dragon's weakened ceiling timbers begin to collapse in round 6.

The tavern convulses as more violent tremors strike. The great beams holding the upper floor aloft begin to buckle ominously.

It should be clear to the PCs that the tavern is about to collapse. In round 7, read:

The aging timbers above your head snap like kindling. A shower of floorboards and furniture heralds the upper floor's collapse.

The collapsing roof makes an attack against each character still in the tavern: +15 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone. Characters not hit by the attack manage to stagger clear just ahead of the tavern's collapse, though you might call for final Athletics or Acrobatics checks for dramatic effect. PCs knocked prone by the collapse can dig themselves out with assistance.

Trapped Villager

A villager is trapped under a fallen table with either broken bones or a head wound.

Across the room, you make out the form of a villager trapped beneath a heavy table.

With a successful Athletics check, a PC can heave the table off the villager and drag him out of the tavern. This earns 1 success in the skill challenge.

Terrified Villager

One of the villagers, believing that giants or monstrous beasts are outside the tavern, cowers beneath a table, refusing to come out.

One of the terrified locals crouches beneath a table, whimpering as the tavern is torn apart around him.

The villager believes that if he emerges from under the table, he will die. A successful Diplomacy or Intimidate check coaxes him out. This earns 1 success in the skill challenge.

Use the named NPCs as the subjects of this event.

Aftermath

When the PCs stagger from the ruins of the Green Dragon, a scene of chaos and destruction greets them. Proceed to the "Flowing Death" tactical encounter on the next page.

Flowing Death

Encounter Level 11 (3,000 XP)

Setup

1 scion of chaos (C)
8 chaos maulers (M)
2 skulking terrors (S)

When the PCs escape or dig themselves out from the ruined tavern, a scene of devastation greets them. In only a few moments, this vibrant, thriving community has been reduced to ruins.

Flames leap high in the air, silhouetting huddled survivors against the heaped mounds of rubble that were once their homes. Many of the buildings in the immediate vicinity have at least partially collapsed, and fires are spreading through the ruins. A terrified screaming rises in the distance along the main track, Villagers are running toward you, a dark shape oozing down the street behind them.

To give the villagers time to flee the destruction, the PCs must defeat the monsters that have accompanied the release of the blood chaos.

When the PCs are in a position to see the blood chaos flowing from below the Mottled Tower, read:

A viscous purple-red tide is flowing into Talar, pouring out from a low, craggy hill at the edge of the village. A tower of mottled stone stands atop the hill, the ooze flowing out through a hole blasted out beneath it. Where twin arms of the flow have circled a collapsed house, fire suddenly flares, trapping a terrified and heavily pregnant woman on an adjacent wagon.

Scion of Chaos (C) **Level 11 Controller**
Huge elemental animate **XP 600**

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +9
Whirling Tentacles aura 2; the scion of chaos slides any creature that starts its turn in the aura 2 squares.
HP 117; **Bloodied** 58
AC 25; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24
Resist acid 10, fire 10
Speed 6

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 3; +16 vs. AC; 2d8+4 fire damage

⊕ **Staggering Strike** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 10; +14 vs. Fortitude; 2d6+6 damage and the target is pushed 3 squares.

✳ **Coils of Immobility** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Area burst 2 within 10; targets enemies only; +13 vs. Reflex; 2d8+4 damage and the target is restrained (save ends)

Liquid Body
The scion of chaos is perfectly adapted to living in blood chaos. It can move through blood chaos without penalty and takes no damage from contact with blood chaos.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 17 (+8) **Dex** 19 (+9) **Wis** 19 (+9)
Con 21 (+10) **Int** 16 (+8) **Cha** 21 (+10)

8 Chaos Maulers (M) **Level 11 Minion**
Large elemental animate **XP 150**

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +7
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC 23; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Speed 6

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +14 vs. AC; 8 fire damage

Liquid Body
The chaos mauler is perfectly adapted to living in blood chaos. It can move through blood chaos without penalty and takes no damage from contact with blood chaos.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 23 (+11) **Dex** 18 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 11 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+8)

2 Skulking Terrors (S) **Level 11 Lurker**
Medium elemental animate **XP 600**

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +11
HP 83; **Bloodied** 41
AC 25; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21
Speed 6, fly 6

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+16 vs. AC; 2d6+6 damage

Lethargic Countenance (standard action; at-will)
Close burst 3; +12 vs. Will; the target is slowed and grants combat advantage to the skulking terror until the end of the skulking terror's next turn. After all attacks are resolved, the skulking terror teleports 8 squares and gains a +4 power bonus to all defenses against ranged and area attacks.

Combat Advantage
The skulking terror deals an extra 2d6 damage on melee attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.

Liquid Body
The skulking terror is perfectly adapted to living in blood chaos. It can move through blood chaos without penalty and takes no damage from contact with blood chaos.

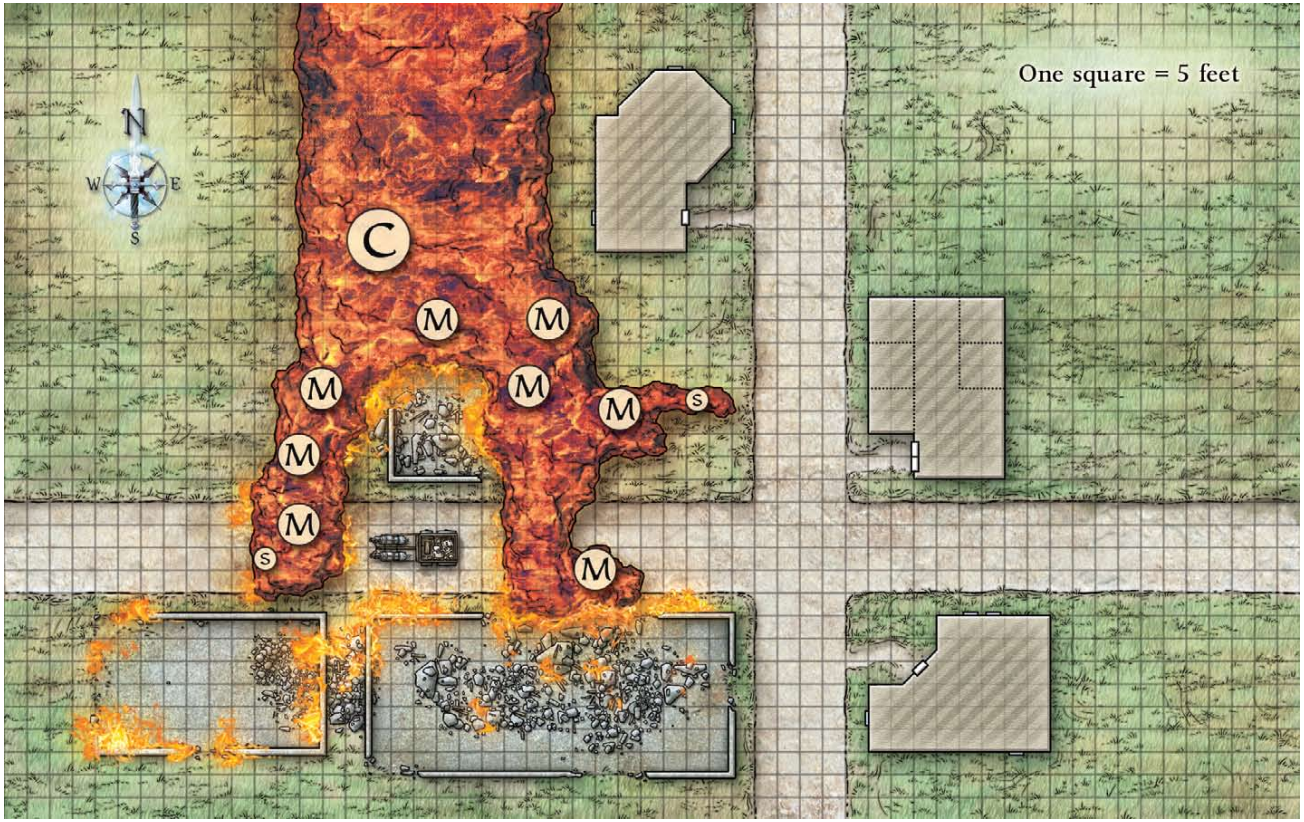
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 14 (+7) **Dex** 19 (+9) **Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 11 (+5) **Int** 13 (+6) **Cha** 12 (+6)

Tactics

The scion of chaos hangs back from melee, using its *coils of immobility* to halt foes in their tracks. While that power recharges, it makes *staggering strike* attacks to batter strikers and defenders out of position.

The skulking terrors fight from within the blood chaos to maintain concealment. They use *lethargic countenance* against PCs already engaged in melee with the chaos maulers, then follow up with slam attacks against slowed targets.

The chaos maulers flank to maintain combat advantage, moving freely through the blood chaos in the hope that foes follow them.



Features of the Area

Illumination: The fires spreading through the village fill the area with dim light.

Burning and Ruined Buildings: The three ruined buildings are now little more than piles of rubble with burning roofs. Squares containing rubble are difficult terrain. A creature that enters or starts its turn in a burning square takes 1d10 fire damage.

Smoke: A haze of thick, acrid smoke billows across the area. Squares of smoke are heavily obscured. Within the smoke, adjacent creatures have concealment, while creatures not adjacent have total concealment.

Trapped Wagon: The blood chaos flow reaches the trapped wagon in 5 rounds, but the PCs' performance in the previous skill challenge affects how long it takes them to enter this encounter. If the PCs failed the skill challenge, they have only 2 rounds until the blood chaos reaches the wagon. Once the blood chaos reaches the wagon, it destroys it and kills the terrified villager in 1 round.

Blood Chaos Flow: The oozing tide of purple-red ooze is blood chaos. Blood chaos moves only 1 square per round, but this potent distillation of elemental energy burns inanimate objects and melts living flesh. Squares filled with blood chaos are difficult terrain. A creature that enters or begins its turn in an area of blood chaos takes 2d6 + 3 acid and fire damage and is slowed (save ends).

Aftermath

Once the PCs have defeated the monsters here, it becomes apparent that the flow of liquid engulfing the village shows no sign of abating. Unless the blood chaos is stopped at its source, Talar will be destroyed.

Return to "At the Tower," page 17.

Creatures of Chaos

This encounter features new monsters spawned from the raging blood chaos. Use these descriptive notes when the creatures appear.

Scion of Chaos: This undulating orb of melting orange and purple flesh writhes toward you on a bed of muscular tentacles. A ring of larger tentacles juts from the top of the orb.

Chaos Mauler: This hulking creature is seemingly composed of congealed purple-orange liquid. Its head has no eyes or other features, and a single thick tentacle grows from its belly.

Skulking Terror: This paper-thin creature resembles a headless, flattened orange and purple bat. It drips a viscous ichor in its wake from a number of small holes on its underside.

UNBOUND

Encounter Level 11 (3,000 XP)

Setup

2 grimlock ambushers (G)
1 foulspawn seer (F)
2 mezzodemons (M)

A group of monsters kept by Falrinth for experimental purposes has been freed by the tower's collapse. Though enraged by their long incarceration, these creatures remain fearful as a result of the tower's ongoing collapse. Claiming their stolen weapons from a nearby storage locker, they lurk here among the ruins of their prison, awaiting prey upon which they can revenge themselves.

Perception Check
DC 16: *Something large is moving beyond the bottom of the stairs ahead.*

When the PCs enter this area, read:
Three large cells stand along the walls of this gloomy chamber. All show signs of extensive damage, their bars wrenched free and scattered across the floor. To the left, open double doors provide access to another area beyond. To the right, a large insectoid creature bearing a trident lurks between the cells. At the sight of you, it snarls and begins to advance.

2 Grimlock Ambushers (G) **Level 11 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (blind) XP 600

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +7; blindsight 10
HP 110; **Bloodied** 55; see also *offensive shift*
AC 26; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23
Immune gaze
Speed 6

⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage (crit 2d12 + 17)

↯ **Offensive Shift** (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves within 2 squares of the grimlock ambusher and attacks an ally of the grimlock; recharges when first bloodied)
The grimlock ambusher shifts and makes a melee basic attack against the triggering creature.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Athletics +15, Endurance +12
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 14 (+7) **Int** 9 (+4) **Cha** 9 (+4)
Equipment greataxe

Foulspawn Seer (F) **Level 11 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium aberrant humanoid XP 600

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +9; low-light vision
Foul Insight aura 10; an ally in the aura that can hear the foulspawn seer gains a +2 power bonus to one attack roll, skill check, ability check, or saving throw on its turn.
AC 24; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21
HP 86; **Bloodied** 43
Speed 6, teleport 3

⊕ **Twisted Staff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+14 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

↷ **Warp Orb** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 10; + 16 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

✧ **Distortion Blast** (standard; daily)
Close blast 5; +12 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). Aberrant creatures take half damage.

Bend Space (immediate interrupt, when the foulspawn seer would be hit by an attack; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Teleportation**
The foulspawn seer teleports 3 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech, telepathy 10
Str 10 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 8 (+4)
Con 14 (+7) **Int** 22 (+11) **Cha** 18 (+9)
Equipment staff

2 Mezzodemons (M) **Level 11 Soldier**
Medium elemental humanoid (demon) XP 600

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 113; **Bloodied** 56
AC 27; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Resist 20 poison, 10 variable (2/encounter; see *MM* glossary)
Speed 6

⊕ **Trident** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

↯ **Skewering Tines** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires trident; Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage and is restrained (save ends both). While the target is restrained, the mezzodemon cannot make trident attacks.

↷ **Poison Breath** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
Skills Intimidate +11
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 15 (+7) **Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 17 (+8) **Int** 10 (+5) **Cha** 13 (+6)
Equipment trident

Tactics

The mezzodemon in the cells uses *skewering tines* to pin an opponent in front of it, ideally preventing that PC from entering melee. The other mezzodemon charges into the fray, using *poison breath* as soon as it can target two or more opponents.

Lurking by the open double doors, the grimlock ambushers fight as a pair, flanking for combat advantage and enabling their *offensive shift*.

The foulspawn seer stays back from melee, using the grimlock ambushers as a screen. It hurls *warp orbs* at targets at the edge of the fray, switching to *distortion blast* against foes that press it. It uses *bend space* as often as possible, moving to position another monster between it and the PCs.

These former prisoners are allied in their rage but they do not flank except with creatures of their own kind. They fight to the death.

Features of the Area

Debris: Squares adjacent to the bookshelves, desks, and tables are covered with debris and are difficult terrain.

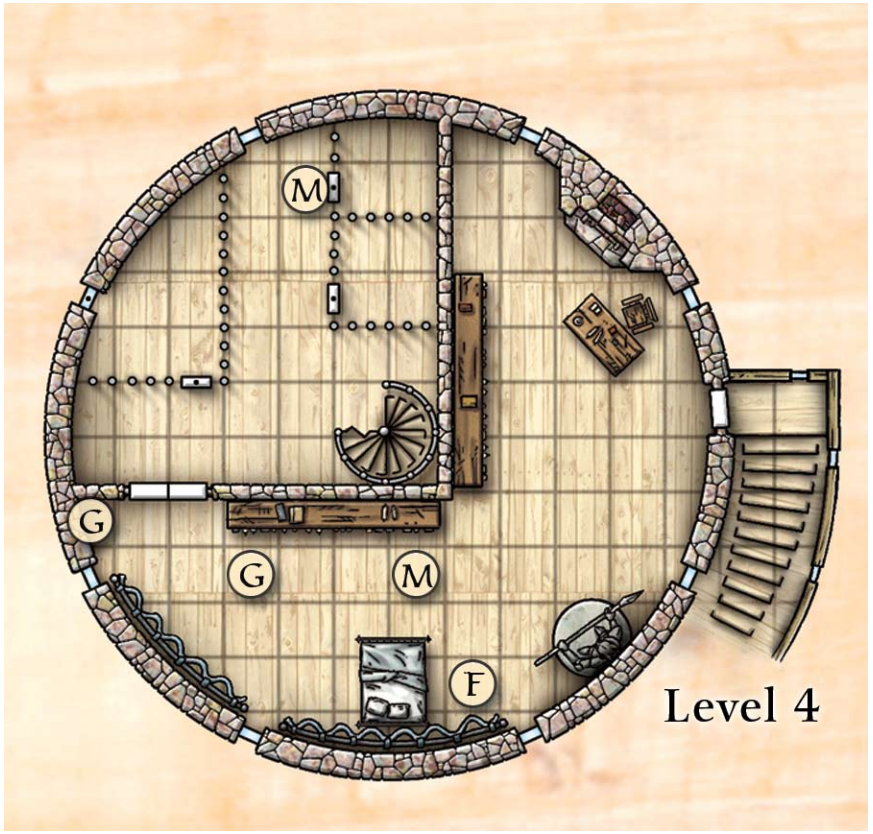
Tables: The tables are tall enough that a Small creature can move under them and gain cover. It costs 2 squares of movement to hop up onto a table. A character can make a DC 10 Strength check to tip over a table, which then grants superior cover.

Double Doors: These doors stand open. Because of damage from the collapse, closing them requires a DC 15 Strength check.

Cages: The earthquake loosened the bars of these floor-to-ceiling cages, allowing the creatures here to escape. Medium or smaller characters can squeeze through the remaining bars, but doing so requires 2 extra squares of movement.

Shattered Weapons Locker: Falrinth kept his prisoners' equipment in a case near their cages. As soon as they escaped, they shattered the case and reclaimed their weapons.

Structural Damage: As detailed in "Mottled Tower Overview," this area of the tower has suffered structural damage from its plunge into the earth. Although the combatants are in no danger here, describe the floor creaking and bowing alarmingly, dust falling from above, and so on.



Blood Chaos Caverns

Encounter Level 14 (5,150 XP)

Setup

1 shadar-kai witch (S)
2 githyanki warriors (G)
8 troglodyte warriors (T)

Sarshan's agents have successfully initiated the blood chaos flow far below the Mottled Tower. Having finally completed their work, the team is in the process of activating an escape portal before the chamber is completely inundated.

When the PCs reach the hole leading into this area, read:

A jagged hole splits the stone floor, flickering light welling up from a natural cavern below. Shadows move within the light, signs of something lurking deep beneath the tower.

Perception Check

DC 21: *From ahead, a voice speaks the words of a ritual.*

Arcana Check (after a successful Perception check)

DC 21: *The ritual being performed is Linked Portal, and the speaker is close to completion.*

The shadar-kai witch and her guards attack as soon as they notice the PCs.

Tactics

The shadar-kai witch cloaks herself with *deep shadow*, which she sustains as a minor action for as long as possible. She attacks first with *beshadowed mind*, reusing that power each time it recharges and making blackfire touch attacks otherwise. She uses *ebon burst* if attacked by more than one opponent, followed by *shadow jaunt* to reposition herself.

Shadar-Kai Witch (S) **Level 14 Elite Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 2,000

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +9, low-light vision
HP 272; **Bloodied** 136
AC 30; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 25
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6; see also *shadow jaunt*
Action Points 1

⊕ **Blackfire Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
+18 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 fire and necrotic damage.

Beshadowed Mind (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚅ ⚅) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Will; 3d6 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target has no line of sight to anything more than 2 squares from it (save ends).

Deep Shadow (standard; sustain minor; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
Aura 2; thick, writhing shadows surround the shadar-kai witch. The witch and any other shadow creatures in the aura gain concealment. In addition, enemies that enter or start their turns in the aura take 5 necrotic damage, and enemies (including flying ones) also treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain. The shadar-kai witch can sustain the aura as a minor action. However, the effect ends if she uses *shadow jaunt* or moves more than half her speed on her turn. *Sustain Minor:* The aura persists.

Ebon Burst (standard; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close burst 2; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the shadar-kai witch's next turn.

Shadow Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The shadar-kai witch teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of her next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +13, Arcana +18, Religion +18, Stealth +18
Str 17 (+10) **Dex** 19 (+11) **Wis** 15 (+9)
Con 16 (+10) **Int** 23 (+13) **Cha** 17 (+10)
Equipment ritual book containing Linked Portal

The githyanki warriors use *telekinetic leap* to bypass the party's front line, then use *telekinetic grasp* on lightly armored opponents before attacking with their silver greatswords.

2 Githyanki Warriors (G) **Level 12 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 700

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +12
HP 118; **Bloodied** 59
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5; see also *telekinetic leap*

⊕ **Silver Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 plus 1d6 psychic damage, and an extra 3d6 psychic damage if the target is immobilized.

Telekinetic Grasp (standard; sustain minor; encounter)
Ranged 5; Medium or small target; +15 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).

Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the githyanki warrior or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills History +9, Insight +12
Str 21 (+11) **Dex** 17 (+9) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 14 (+8) **Int** 12 (+7) **Cha** 13 (+7)
Equipment plate armor, silver greatsword

8 Troglodyte Warriors (T) **Level 12 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) XP 175

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
Troglodyte Stench aura 1; living enemies in the aura take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 25; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21
Speed 5

⊕ **Club** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+15 vs. AC; 7 damage

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +14, Endurance +13
Str 18 (+9) **Dex** 12 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+5)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 6 (+3) **Cha** 8 (+4)
Equipment light shield, club

The troglodyte warriors move to surround and cut down the closest enemies, flanking for combat advantage.

Deadly Rockslide	**Level 8 Lurker**
Hazard	XP 350

A shower of rock and stone falls from the crumbling foundations of the sinking tower.

Hazard: Rocks tumble down in a target square and make a burst 3 attack.

Perception

Characters can't use Perception to detect this hazard.

Additional Skills: Nature or Dungeoneering

A DC 16 Nature or Dungeoneering check notices that the cavern is unstable.

Initiative +13

Trigger

The rockslide is triggered by the start of combat in the cavern. When combat begins, the rockslide rolls for initiative. Between the start of combat and the rockslide's first attack, characters know that a rockslide is beginning but they do not know which squares it will effect.

Attack

Standard Action Close burst 3

Targets: Creatures in burst

Attack: +11 vs. Reflex

Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage

Miss: Half damage

Sustain Standard: The rockslide continues until the floodgates are closed.

Countermeasures

✦ A character in the burst can take advantage of natural openings in the slide to avoid damage by making a DC 21 Nature or Dungeoneering check. With a successful check, a character takes half damage (no damage if the slide misses).

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light from a lantern set in the center of the teleportation circle illuminates the floodgates and the surrounding area. The rest of the chamber is in darkness.

Ceiling: 20 feet high. A wide, jagged hole in the ceiling provides access to the tower. The rubble-filled squares directly below the hole are difficult terrain.

Natural Cavern Walls: The rough cavern walls can be easily climbed (Athletics DC 10).

Portal Circle: The shadar-kai witch has inscribed a circle for a Linked Portal ritual on the floor in chalk and powdered gemstone.

Floodgates: Three floodgates pierce the north wall near the ceiling. The left gates are open and spewing blood chaos toward the village (it is this flow that has blasted the tunnel through the hill). The flow from the open right-hand gates has burned another tunnel through the hill to the tower's moat. The middle gates remain closed. Large gear wheels can be turned to open and close the floodgates (Strength DC 21).

Blood Chaos: Blood chaos covers the indicated squares to a depth of 3 feet. These squares are difficult terrain. This potent distillation of elemental energy burns inanimate objects and melts living flesh. A creature that enters or begins its turn in an area of blood chaos takes 2d6 + 3 acid and fire damage and is slowed (save ends).

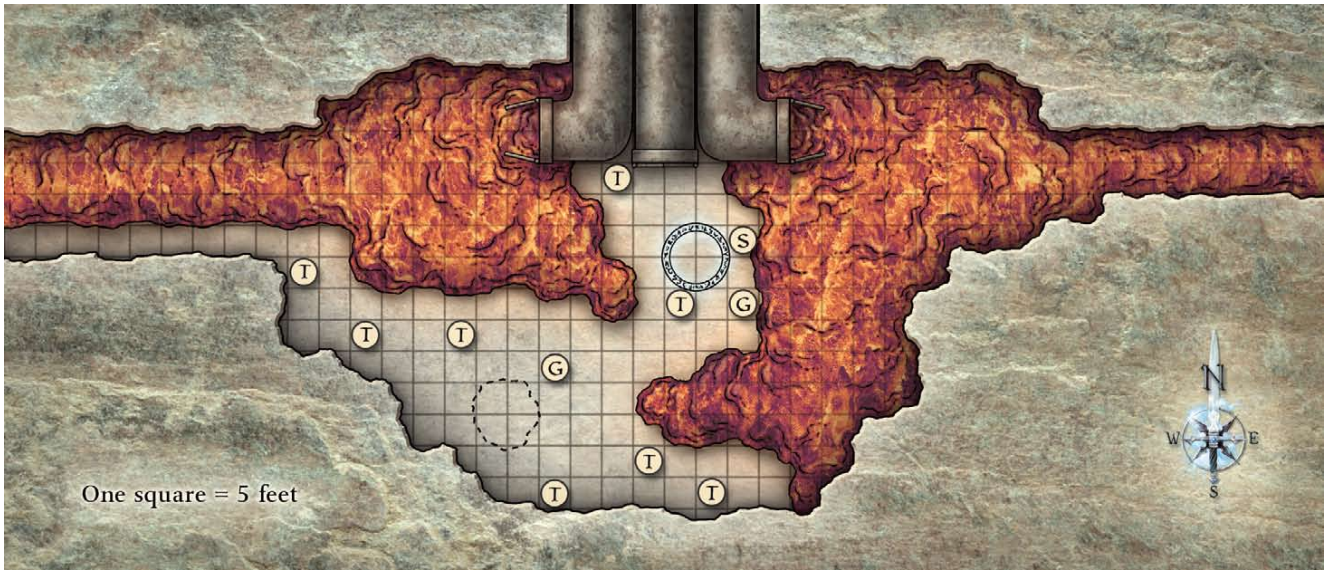
Unstable Cavern: The earthquake and the subsequent flow of blood chaos into the chamber have undercut the foundations of this cavern. A shower of dust and stones falls constantly from the walls and ceiling. Each round, a rockslide hits (see the statistics block), centered on a square occupied by a randomly determined combatant.

Closing the Gates

After the battle is over, the PCs can shut the two open floodgates without difficulty. During the battle, an adjacent character can shut the floodgates as a full-round action.

Aftermath

Once the PCs have defeated Sarshan's servants, they can learn more about recent events. Proceed to "The Chase Is On (Part 1)" skill challenge on the next page.



The Chase Is On (Part 1)

Encounter Level 11 (1,200 XP)

Setup

The PCs' pursuit of Sarshan plays out as a connected two-part skill challenge. In this first part, they must glean what Megan and Falrinth know even as they search the blood chaos caverns for clues.

The Chase Is On (Part 1)	**Level 11**
Skill Challenge	XP 1,200

The threat under the tower has been vanquished. Now, even as you attempt to activate the teleportation circle, you must overcome Megan and Falrinth's animosity to discover who or what is behind the destruction in Talar.

Once the PCs have defeated the threat under the tower, they can learn more about recent events and discover the danger Sarshan's plans pose to Elsir Vale. Once they return to the roof to speak with Megan and Falrinth, or if they seem likely to activate the teleportation circle, begin the skill challenge.

Complexity

2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills

Arcana, Diplomacy, Intimidate.

Other Skills

Bluff.

Victory

The PCs collect the information they need and activate the teleportation circle in a timely fashion.

Defeat

Although the PCs manage to gain some relevant information and to activate the teleportation circle, the time they take in doing so alerts Sarshan that something has gone wrong with the attack. As a result, the PCs face a greater challenge in the "Draconic Wrath" encounter (page 31).

Arcana (DC 16)

(1 success or failure, maximum 2 successes)

The PC is able to recover information regarding the disrupted Linked Portal ritual. The PCs can determine the coordinates of the teleportation circle to which the shadar-kai and her allies were attempting to flee, but they must consult Falrinth to determine where that location is (see below).

Arcana (DC 21)

(1 success or failure, maximum 1 success)

By investigating the floodgates, the PC discovers the secrets of their operation. The gates are of ancient construction, and were built to channel the flow of magical energy. The activation of these ancient gates caused the earthquake that preceded the blood chaos attack.

Bluff (DC 16)

(0 successes or failures)

With a successful check, the PC manages to get on Megan and Falrinth's good side. The next Diplomacy check made in the challenge gains a +2 bonus.

Diplomacy (DC 16)

(1 success or failure, maximum 3 successes)

The PC attempts to convince Falrinth or Megan to work with the party. See below for more information.

Intimidate (DC 16)

(1 success or failure, maximum 2 successes)

The PC forgoes pleasantries in an attempt to force Falrinth or Megan's aid. Though Falrinth can be swayed with threats (see below for more information), attempts to intimidate Megan meet with no success. She gives the PCs no information, earning the party 1 failure in the skill challenge.

Falrinth

The PCs can use Diplomacy or Intimidate to learn more information from Falrinth. The sage is extremely untrusting and insular, and his single-minded dedication to his work has turned him somewhat surly over the years. Falrinth is also extremely greedy, loving gold like the friends and family that abandoned him years before. Although he is grateful for the PCs' assistance, he fears that they will attempt to shake him down for a reward.

Successful Diplomacy or Intimidate checks inspire Falrinth to reveal some or all of the following.

- He had no idea that tunnels existed under his tower.
- He does not know the attackers and has no notion of who they work for. He has no enemies that he is aware of, and knows no shadar-kai.
- If he is given the sigil sequence of the teleportation circle the shadar-kai witch was attempting to teleport to, Falrinth recognizes it as a permanent circle in a fetid swamp far to the south. The swamp is known to sages for its rampant primordial fauna and huge trees.

Megan Swiftblade

Megan already resents the party for outstripping the Freeriders' reputation, and having been rescued by them has not improved her attitude. The PCs must tread carefully if they wish to learn more from her.

Successful Diplomacy checks inspire Megan to reveal some or all of the following information.

- Three assassination attempts have so far been made against Megan and the Freeriders. The rest of the group have scattered across Elsir Vale in an attempt to prevent further attacks.
- Through a mercenary band that escaped from the failed attack on Overlook, the Freeriders discovered that a shadar-kai arms dealer—Sarshan—was providing mercenaries, intelligence, support, and even arms and armor to the githyanki assault.
- Sarshan's current plots revolve around something called blood chaos, with which he means to take retribution against Overlook and Elsir Vale.

Though Megan had not previously known what "blood chaos" referred to, Falrinth knows the name. He can guess that this is the elemental ooze being funneled through the floodgates. Though Sarshan's full plans remain unknown, Falrinth knows that dozens of hidden and secret portals are said to be scattered across Elsir Vale. Sarshan's mastery of portal and planar magic gives him the power to deliver blood chaos to any part of the vale. The scene the PCs witnessed in Talar is set to be repeated across Elsir Vale unless Sarshan can be stopped.

Draconic Wrath

Encounter Level 13 (4,500 XP)

Setup

Antharosk, green dragon (A)
Calaunxin, green dragon (C)

Using the teleportation circle beneath the Mottled Tower, the PCs arrive at the Ever-Tree—an immense oak rising within a lake of blood chaos. Two dragons—Antharosk and Calaunxin—guard the approaches to this living tower.

When the PCs step through the portal, read:
As you shift through the haze of the portal, you emerge on a wooden platform set upon the skeletal branch of an immense oak tree. This stands in the middle of a dismal, fog-shrouded swamp, the tree surrounded by a lake of blood chaos. Its huge roots snake through the boiling ooze like great vipers, while above you, a thick canopy of leaves cuts the light to a perpetual gloom.

As soon as the PCs investigate their surroundings, Antharosk and Calaunxin become aware of their presence and attack.

If the PCs failed the skill challenge of "The Chase Is On (Part 1)," Sarshan has sent a warning to Antharosk and Calaunxin to be ready for intruders. The dragons gain a surprise round, attacking with their breath weapons as soon as the PCs appear on the platform.

Antharosk, Adult Green Dragon (A) — **Level 10 Solo Controller**
Large natural magical beast (dragon) — XP 2,500

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Lashing Tail aura 1; all creatures other than Antharosk treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain. Antharosk loses this aura while airborne.
HP 428; **Bloodied** 214; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 26; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23
Resist 20 poison
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover), overland flight 15; see also *flyby attack*
Action Points 2

Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
Antharosk makes two claw attacks.

Flyby Attack (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞)
Antharosk flies up to 12 squares and makes a bite attack at any point during the move without provoking opportunity attacks from the target.

Tail Sweep (immediate reaction, if an adjacent enemy does not move on its turn; at-will)
+13 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 5; +13 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 4 poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage and is slowed (save ends both). *Aftereffect*: The target is slowed (save ends).

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Antharosk's breath weapon recharges , and he uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +13 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of Antharosk's next turn. *Aftereffect*: The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Bluff +19, Diplomacy +14, Insight +18, Intimidate +14
Str 16 (+8) **Dex** 20 (+10) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 19 (+9) **Int** 16 (+8) **Cha** 18 (+9)

Calaunxin, Adult Green Dragon (C) — **Level 9 Solo Brute**
Large natural magical beast (dragon) — XP 2,000

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 408; **Bloodied** 204; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 23; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22
Resist 20 poison
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover), overland flight 15; see also *flyby attack*
Action Points 2

Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Dragon's Fury (standard; at-will)
Calaunxin makes two claw attacks. If she hits a single target with both claws, she makes a bite attack against the same target.

Flyby Attack (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞)
Calaunxin flies up to 12 squares and makes a bite attack at any point during the move without provoking opportunity attacks from the target.

Luring Glare (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Charm, Gaze**
Ranged 10; +10 vs. Will; the target slides 2 squares.

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 5; +10 vs. Reflex; 4d6 + 6 poison damage, and the target is slowed (save ends both). *Aftereffect*: The target is slowed and weakened (save ends both).

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Calaunxin's breath weapon recharges, and she uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +10 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of Calaunxin's next turn. *Aftereffect*: The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +19
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 12 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 22 (+10) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 10 (+4)

Tactics

Antharosk and Calaunxin are merciless combatants, and are well versed in fighting together.

Antharosk uses his *breath weapon* to slow opponents fighting Calaunxin before switching to *flyby attack*. If an opponent is dealing significant damage with ranged attacks, he uses *frightful presence* to stun it. Antharosk uses one action point in the first round of combat, reserving the other for an extra double attack to finish off a badly injured target.

Calaunxin is more impetuous than Antharosk, and she hurtles into melee using *dragon's fury*. If two or more targets present themselves, she uses her *breath weapon*, relying on *frightful presence* to prevent foes from fleeing. Calaunxin uses her action points to make double *dragon's fury* attacks in the early rounds of combat.

As a mated pair, the dragons are fiercely loyal to each other. If one is slain, the other goes into a berserk fury, focusing all attacks on the opponent that delivered the killing blow.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Daylight filtering down through the tree canopy fills the area with dim light.

Teleportation Circle: This permanent teleportation circle is set atop a wooden platform 40 feet above the ground. AC/Reflex 2, Fortitude 20, 200 hit points.

Stairway: A narrow stairway leads downward through the trunk of the Ever-Tree from the teleportation portal. The stairway is difficult terrain.

Thick Mud: The Ever-Tree grows upon a low island of heavy mud. Squares of mud are difficult terrain.

Blood Chaos Lake: The wide, swampy lake surrounding the Ever-Tree consists of a layer of blood chaos floating atop the water. The lake is typically calm (Athletics DC 10 to swim). Around the Ever-Tree, the lake is 20 feet deep.

The enchanted bole of the Ever-Tree resists the fell effect of the blood chaos, but the lake is dangerous to all other creatures. This potent distillation of elemental energy burns inanimate objects and melts living flesh. A creature that enters or begins its turn in an area of blood chaos takes 2d6 + 3 acid and fire damage and is slowed (save ends).

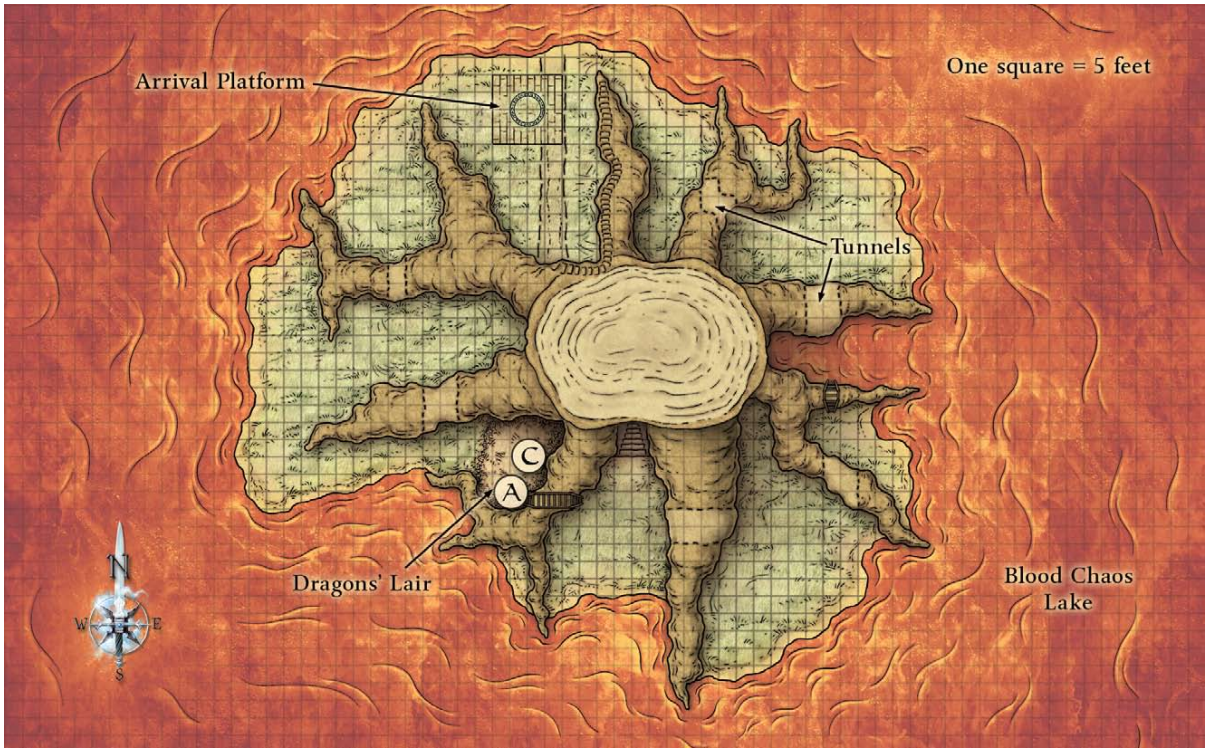
Creatures in the blood chaos must use their swim speed or make a DC 10 Athletics check to move. They gain cover except against attacks from submerged enemies. Fighting in the blood chaos imposes a –2 penalty to attack rolls except with spears and crossbows. Powers that have the fire keyword take a –2 penalty to attack rolls.

Tunnels: Sarshan's servants have carved 7-foot-high tunnels through the Ever-Tree's vast roots.

Ladder: Wooden ladders have been set over the Ever-Tree's smaller roots. Moving over a ladder costs 1 extra square of movement.

Development

Once the PCs have defeated Antharosk and Calaunxin, they can enter the tunnels below the Ever-Tree. Go to "The Chase Is On (Part 2)" on the next page.



The Chase Is On (Part 2)

Encounter Level 11 (1,800 XP)

Setup

In this second part of the connected skill challenge, the PCs enter the tunnels below the Ever-Tree in search of Sarshan. At the culmination of the skill challenge, the PCs catch a first glimpse of the shadar-kai as he works to redirect the flow of blood chaos to another location in the Vale. When he spies the PCs, he flees to an island amid the Sea of Fire deep in the Elemental Chaos.

The Chase Is On (Part 2)	**Level 11**
Skill Challenge	XP 1,800

The fetid tunnels beneath the Ever-Tree are a dark labyrinth, but you have no time to lose.

The PCs make their way through the twisting tunnels beneath the Ever-Tree.

Complexity

3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills

Acrobatics, Athletics, Dungeoneering, Stealth.

Other Skills

Nature.

Victory

The PCs make their way through the tunnels beneath the Ever-Tree without expending significant resources. As a result, they are ready to take the fight to Sarshan's servants.

Defeat

The PCs emerge from the labyrinthine tunnels after a tiring journey. All the PCs lose 1 healing surge and take a –1 penalty to all defenses until the end of the next encounter.

Acrobatics (DC 16)

(1 success or failure, maximum 3 successes).

The PCs must move carefully to traverse the tunnels without losing time. This is a group check. One character acts as lead, while the others make checks to aid that character. Each ally that gets a result of 10 or higher provides a +2 bonus to the lead character's check (which counts as the check to determine success or failure).

Athletics (DC 16)

(1 success or failure, maximum 2 successes)

Huge tree roots and other hazards partially block several of the tunnels (see "Features of the Tunnels"). With a successful Athletics check, the PC clears a path.

Dungeoneering (DC 16)

(1 success or failure, maximum 3 successes)

With a successful check, the PC picks out the correct route through the tunnel warren.

Nature (DC 16)

(0 successes or failures)

With a successful check, the PC senses the presence of a natural hazard. This provides a +2 bonus to one subsequent Acrobatics, Athletics, or Dungeoneering check.

Stealth (DC 16)

(1 success or failure, maximum 3 successes)

With a successful Stealth check, the party manages to slip past a group of guards. This is a group check. One character acts as lead, while the others make checks to aid that character. Each ally that gets a result of 10 or higher provides a +2 bonus to the lead character's check (which counts as the check to determine success or failure). On a failed check, the PCs manage to flee from the guards, but this sets back their progress. Alternatively, turn a failed check into an impromptu combat encounter (see the sidebar).

Development

After making their way through the labyrinth of tunnels beneath the Ever-Tree, the PCs catch a glimpse of Sarshan and must face his servants in a cavern filled with blood chaos. Go to the "In Fetid Darkness" skill challenge on the next page.

Features of the Tunnels

Illumination: Passageways are in darkness; chambers are illuminated by bright light shed by strategically placed lanterns.

Tunnels: Tunnels are normally 10 feet wide.

Chambers: Chambers are normally in better repair than tunnels. Most have flat, packed-mud floors and walls sheathed in wood.

Stench: The smell of mold and decay hangs heavy in the chambers and passages beneath the Ever-Tree. Though unpleasant, the stench has no harmful effect.

Root Curtains: Curtains of roots hang from the ceiling to within 2 feet of the floor. It costs an extra square of movement to push through them. The roots provide cover and block line of sight for any creature not adjacent to them, except creatures that are prone. The roots in a square can be hacked down (AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 10, 10 hit points).

Huge Roots: In places, huge roots pierce the island's muck. These roots are blocking terrain; creatures must either climb over them (Athletics DC 10) or duck under them (costing 2 squares of movement).

Mudslide: Mud fallen away from the wall creates an obstruction. These squares are difficult terrain.

Additional Encounters

If it appears that the PCs will be short of 12th level when they reach the final section of the adventure, consider creating a few additional encounters with Sarshan's followers in this section. Use the notes in "Features of the Tunnels" to create an interesting battle site, then place one of the following groups of monsters or use these groups as inspiration to create your own.

Group 1 (Level 11, 3,000 XP): 1 vampire lord (*MM* 258), 1 banshrae dartswarmer (*MM* 25), 8 ogre thugs (*MM* 198).

Group 2 (Level 12, 3,475 XP): 1 ogre warhulk (*MM* 199), 5 troglodyte warriors (*MM* 252), 1 ettin spirit-talker (*MM* 108).

Group 3 (Level 11; 2,800 XP): 1 stormrage shambler (*MM* 232), 4 shambling mounds (*MM* 232).

In Fetid Darkness

Encounter Level 14 (5,100 XP)

Setup

1 skull lord servitor (L)
2 battle wight bodyguards (W)
1 elder troglodyte curse chanter (C)
4 cyclops guards (G)

As they enter this chamber, the PCs catch their first glimpse of the elusive Sarshan as he flees through a portal. Unfortunately, the shadar-kai's defenders have no intention of allowing the PCs to pursue their master.

When the PCs reach this chamber, read:
A pool of blood chaos and two teleportation circles dominate this chamber, a horribly disfigured shadar-kai fleeing across a slender catwalk as you enter. Even as Sarshan disappears into a misty haze that obscures the rear of the chamber, a three-headed skeletal figure steps out in front of you. A cyclops, a troglodyte, and an armored wight stand close behind.

Tactics

The skull lord takes on the most powerful looking melee combatant with bone staff attacks, making *skull of bonechilling fear* or *skull of withering flame* attacks each round at enemies at the edge of the fray.

The skull lord's battle wight bodyguards fight adjacent to one another to gain the benefit of their *shieldbearer* ability. They focus on PCs seeking to move to the rear of the chamber.

The troglodyte curse chanter stays at the edge of combat, targeting controllers and ranged combatants with *poison ray* and *cavern curse*.

The cyclops guards lay into the closest opponents, flanking for combat advantage and trusting their *evil eye* to grant them extra melee attacks.

4 Cyclops Guards (G) **Level 14 Minion**
Large fey humanoid XP 250
Initiative +8 **Perception** +13; truesight 6
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23
Speed 6
⊕ **Battleaxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 7 damage.
↯ **Evil Eye** (immediate reaction, when a melee attack misses the cyclops guard; at-will)
The cyclops guard makes a melee basic attack against the triggering attacker.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Str 22 (+11) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 11 (+5) **Cha** 11 (+5)
Equipment hide armor, heavy shield, battleaxe

Skull Lord Servitor (L) **Level 14 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 1,000
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
Master of the Grave (Healing) aura 2; undead allies in the aura gain regeneration 5 and a +2 bonus to saving throws. This aura ends when the *skull of death's command* is destroyed.
HP 55; **Bloodied** 27; see also *triple skulls*
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 27
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 5 radiant
Speed 6
⊕ **Bone Staff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage plus 1d6 necrotic damage.
↛ **Skull of Bonechilling Fear** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Fear**
Ranged 10; +19 vs. Will; 1d10 + 3 cold damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares.
↛ **Skull of Death's Command** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; the skull lord restores a destroyed undead minion within range. The restored undead minion's level must be no higher than the skull lord's level +2. The restored minion stands in the space where is fell (or in any adjacent space if that space is occupied) as a free action, has normal full hit points, and can take actions (as normal) on its next turn.
↛ **Skull of Withering Flame** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +19 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 5 fire and necrotic damage.
Triple Skulls ✦ **Healing**
When a skull lord is reduced to 0 hit points, one of its skulls (determined randomly from the three powers above) is destroyed, and it loses the ability to use that power. If the creature has any skulls remaining, it instantly heals to full hit points (55 hit points). When all three skulls are destroyed, the skull lord is destroyed as well.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Bluff +18, Insight +15, Intimidate +18
Str 14 (+9) **Dex** 18 (+11) **Wis** 16 (+10)
Con 19 (+11) **Int** 17 (+10) **Cha** 23 (+13)
Equipment staff, 3 iron crowns, ritual book

2 Battle Wight Bodyguards (W) **Level 11 Elite Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 1,200
Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 230; **Bloodied** 115
AC 29; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Saving Throws +2
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 5
Action Points 1

⊕ **Souldraining Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
+18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target loses 1 healing surge and is immobilized (save ends); see also *indomitable presence.*

↗ **Soul Reaping** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Healing, Necrotic**
Ranged 5; affects an immobilized target only; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 necrotic damage, and the battle wight regains 10 hit points; see also *indomitable presence.*

↯ **Chosen Target** (immediate interrupt, when a marked enemy shifts or makes an attack that does not include the bodyguard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The battle wight bodyguard makes a melee basic attack against the triggering creature.

Indomitable Presence
Each time a bodyguard attacks an enemy, the target is marked until the end of the bodyguard's next turn.

Shieldbearer
Allies adjacent to the bodyguard gain a +2 power bonus to AC.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Intimidate +15
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 9 (+4)
Con 19 (+9) **Int** 12 (+6) **Cha** 21 (+10)

Elder Troglodyte Curse Chanter (C) **Level 12 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) XP 700
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
Troglodyte Stench aura 1; living enemies in the aura take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 127; **Bloodied** 63
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 26
Speed 5

⊕ **Quarterstaff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+14 vs. AC; 1d4 + 4 damage.

↗ **Poison Ray** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 10; +15 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 6 poison damage, and the target is weakened (save ends)

↗ **Cavern Curse** (standard; recharge ⚀ ⚁ ⚂ ⚃ ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 5; +16 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage and is slowed (save ends both)

↯ **Tunnel Grace** (minor 1/round; recharge ⚁ ⚂ ⚃)
Close burst 10; all allies in the burst gain +5 speed until the end of the troglodyte curse chanter's next turn.

↯ **Chant of Renewal** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Close burst 5; bloodied allies in the burst regain 15 hit points.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Dungeoneering +15, Endurance +17, Religion +11
Str 16 (+9) **Dex** 12 (+7) **Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 23 (+12) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 15 (+8)
Equipment robes, quarterstaff, skull mask

Development

Once these defenders have been defeated, the PCs can pursue Sarshan. The entire northern portion of the cavern is undercut by a buried permanent teleportation circle that acts as a portal to the Elemental Chaos. The skull lord's ritual book contains the location of Sarshan's lair.

A DC 16 Arcana check reveals that strengthening magic has been applied to the portal by Sarshan. As such, activating the portal does not require a full Planar Portal ritual. However, the shadar-kai magically locked the portal when he fled, so that the PCs must successfully complete a skill challenge to activate it: complexity 1 (4 successes before 3 failures); Arcana, Religion, Nature; all checks DC 21. If successful, the portal opens up 4 hours later. If unsuccessful, the PCs can attempt the skill challenge again (repeatedly if necessary) after 12 hours.

Documents carried by the skull lord identify it as an envoy of Onthorirfel, a lich dwelling in the Shadowfell. These documents also suggest that Sarshan and the lich have been collaborating on some plot, though no details are provided. A DC 21 Arcana check confirms that Onthorirfel is a powerful lich famed for his specialization in ritual magic. Although this information is not immediately relevant, it will become important in later adventures.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light is shed by lanterns set about the chamber.

Walls: The walls of the chamber are a mixture of packed mud and thick root growth (Athletics DC 15 to scale).

Wooden Steps: Wooden facing panels hold together these crumbling mud steps.

Catwalk: A thick tree trunk planed flat on one side serves as a bridge across the blood chaos pool. It is not perfectly set in the mud floor and rocks slightly when walked on (Acrobatics DC 10 to cross).

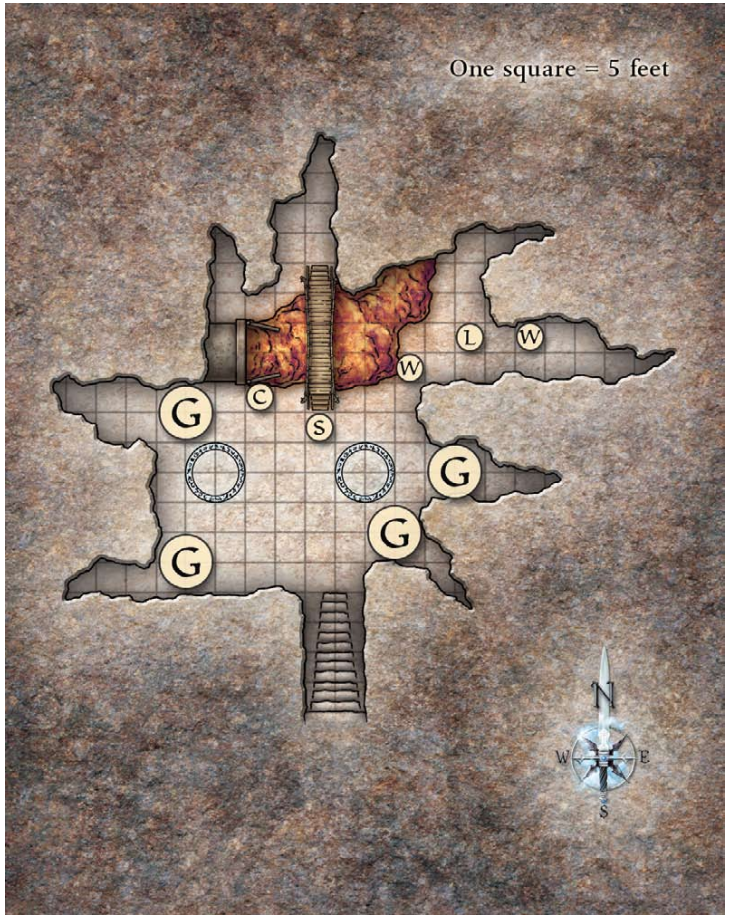
Floodgate: A great quantity of blood chaos siphoned from Sarshan's main reservoir bubbles at the other end of the floodgate. Blood chaos flows from the floodgate in the northwest wall into the pool below. The pipe has a cap that can be closed as a full-round action by a character adjacent to or on the pipe. Characters can close the pipe while standing in the blood chaos pool (but see below).

It takes a DC 20 Acrobatics check for characters to perch atop the slick pipe.

Portal Circles: The portions of the floor containing teleportation circles are magically hardened mud, within which mystic sigils have been burned. These portals are currently inactive, but a DC 16 Arcana check determines that they are designed to allow the flow of blood chaos to other locations.

Pool of Blood Chaos: The pool of blood chaos stands between 10 and 15 feet deep. Squares filled with blood chaos are difficult terrain. This potent distillation of elemental energy burns inanimate objects and melts living flesh. A creature that enters or begins its turn in an area of blood chaos takes 2d6 + 3 acid and fire damage and is slowed (save ends).

Creatures in the blood chaos must use their swim speed or make a DC 10 Athletics check to move. They gain cover except against attacks from submerged enemies. Fighting in the blood chaos imposes a –2 penalty to attack rolls except with spears and crossbows. Powers that have the fire keyword take a –2 penalty to attack rolls.



Sea of Fire

Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

Setup

1 flame shard (S)
1 duergar hellcaller (D)
1 redspawn firebelcher (R)
2 githyanki warriors (G)

Sarshan keeps the perimeter of his island lair well guarded. Because the shadar-kai's business dealings cross every known plane, his servants are a diverse lot.

When the PCs arrive on the portal earthberg, they find the island guard alert and ready for them. They take advantage of the shifting position of the earthbergs (see "Features of the Area"), attempting to keep the PCs from reaching the main island and the tower path.

When the PCs arrive in the teleportation circle, read:

A blast of heat heralds your arrival in the midst of an ocean of molten rock. Around the destination teleportation circle, numerous small islands float on this burning sea like icebergs of rock and earth. These earthbergs drift in proximity to a much larger island to the south. Tall dikes on this main island shield it from the worst of the molten waves.

Through the heat haze, creatures are visible. A dwarf with coal-dark skin and blonde hair is stationed on one of the earthbergs, while a large, wingless dragon guards another. On the island, two githyanki stand with silver swords drawn. Close by, a red crystal floats above the lava sea.

Perception Check

DC 16: *The air above the fiery sea shimmers and dances with the incredible heat. However, a magnificent city is visible far to the north, its brass towers and minarets glittering on the horizon.*

DC 21: *The dike around the large island has clearly kept it safe from the lava for countless years, but even as you watch, high waves break over the top. Molten rock is beginning to pool and spread within the wall, the island shuddering with a faint groan.*

Development

Once the PCs have overcome the island's defenders, they can follow the path to the tower. Go to the "Galleries" encounter on page 39.

Flame Shard (S) **Level 12 Artillery**
Medium elemental magical beast **XP 700**

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
Heat Wave (**Fire**) aura 2; any enemy that ends its turn within the aura takes 5 fire damage and takes a -2 penalty to saving throws against ongoing fire damage during its current turn.
HP 100; **Bloodied** 50
AC 24; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 variable (2/encounter)
Speed 4, fly 4 (hover)

⊕ **Burning Shard** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Melee 1; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 fire damage.

Flame Shatter (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Fire**
Close burst 2; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 fire damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Flame Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Area burst 2 within 20; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 fire damage.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Str 19 (+10) **Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 15 (+8)
Con 22 (+12) **Int** 7 (+4) **Cha** 18 (+10)

Duergar Hellcaller (D) **Level 12 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, dwarf (devil) **XP 700**

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 96; **Bloodied** 48
AC 24; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 25
Resist 10 fire, 10 poison
Speed 5

⊕ **Mace** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Melee 1; +19 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Infernal Quills (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Poison**
Ranged 10; +19 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 fire and poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 fire and poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

Quick Quill Strike (minor; encounter) ✦ **Fire, Poison**
The duergar hellcaller makes an *infernal quills* attack.

Asmodeus's Ruby Curse (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Close blast 5; targets enemies; +16 vs. Will; 3d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the duergar slides the target to the nearest space outside the blast. This forced movement provokes opportunity attacks.

Quill Storm (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire, Poison**
Area burst 2 within 10; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d8 fire and poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 fire and poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

Devilish Sacrifice (immediate interrupt, when an enemy makes a melee attack roll against the duergar hellcaller; encounter)
The duergar hellcaller shifts to the nearest space beyond the triggering attack's reach. A legion devil hellguard (*MM* 64) appears in the duergar's former space and becomes the target of the triggering attack. The devil acts immediately after the duergar hellcaller's initiative.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
Skills Arcana +11, Dungeoneering +13, Religion +11
Str 14 (+8) **Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 18 (+10) **Int** 11 (+6) **Cha** 22 (+12)
Equipment leather armor, mace

Redspawn Firebelcher (F)	Level 12 Artillery
Large natural beast (reptile)	XP 700
Initiative +7	**Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision
Fire Within (Fire) aura 5; allies in the aura gain resist 10 fire.	
HP 97; **Bloodied** 48	
AC 25; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21	
Resist 20 fire	
Speed 4	
Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
+16 vs. AC; 1d10 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
Fire Belch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
Ranged 12; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 1 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
Fire Burst (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**	
Area burst 2 within 10; +15 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 1 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage, and no ongoing fire damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 18 (+10)	**Dex** 13 (+7) **Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 19 (+10)	**Int** 2 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+5)

2 Githyanki Warriors (G)	Level 12 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid	XP 700
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +12
HP 118; **Bloodied** 59	
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22	
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects	
Speed 5; see also telekinetic leap	
Silver Greatsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**	
+17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 plus 1d6 psychic damage, and an extra 3d6 psychic damage if the target is immobilized.	
Telekinetic Grasp (standard; encounter)	
Ranged 5; Medium or smaller target; +15 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).	
Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)	
Ranged 10; the githyanki warrior or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills History +9, Insight +12	
Str 21 (+11)	**Dex** 17 (+9) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 14 (+8)	**Int** 12 (+7) **Cha** 13 (+7)
Equipment plate armor, silver greatsword	

Tactics

The duergar hellcaller uses *Asmodeus's ruby curse* to push as many PCs as possible into the magma. It then uses *quick quill strike* and *infernal quills* to target foes on other earthbergs. If pressed in melee, the duergar uses *devilish sacrifice* to gain an unexpected ally.

The flame shard hammers all foes within range with *flame burst* attacks, keeping enemies close to take advantage of its *heat wave* aura.

The redspawn firebelcher hits the PCs first with *fire burst*, then alternates *fire belch* and bite attacks.

The githyanki use *telekinetic grasp* to immobilize PCs fighting their allies on the earthbergs. If those defenders fall, or if the PCs make it to the island, the githyanki attack with their silver greatswords, using *telekinetic leap* to get quickly into the fray.

Sarshan's guards attempt to keep intruders off the island, following the PCs inland if necessary.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The molten sea provides bright illumination throughout the area.

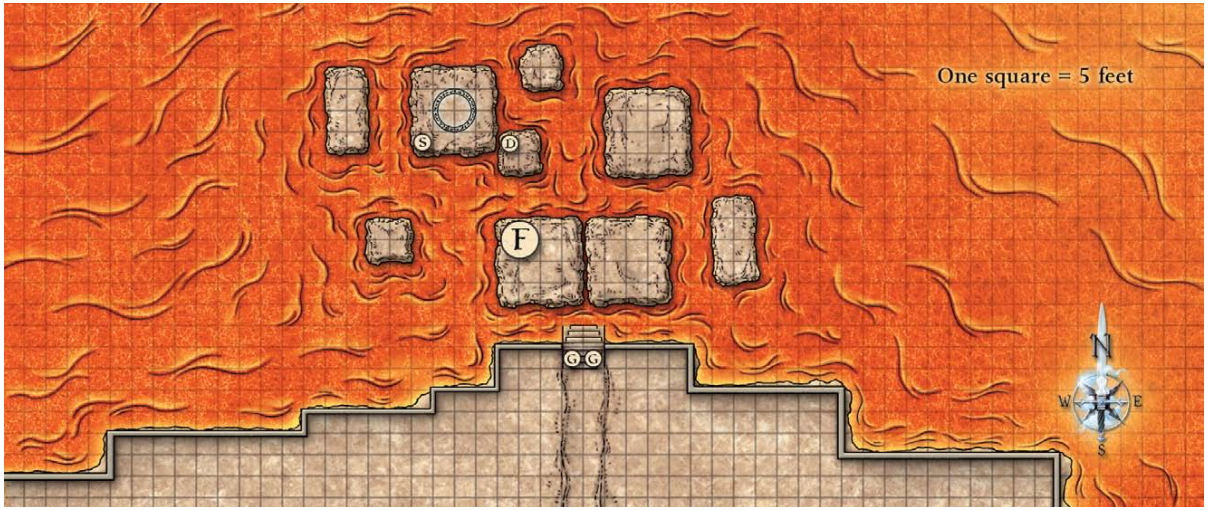
Burning Heat: The heat of the Sea of Fire taxes creatures in proximity to it. A creature that ends its turn standing on an earthberg gains vulnerable 5 fire.

Earthbergs: Like icebergs in the world, the earthbergs stay in constant motion on the lava sea. If you use separate dungeon tiles or other maps for the earthbergs, roll 1d4 and 1d8 for each one at the end of each round of combat. The d8 determines the direction of the earthberg's drift, while the d4 indicates the number of spaces it moves. Earthbergs can end up next to each other, but an earthberg stops if it would move into another's space.

Lava: Creatures that fall into the molten lava of the Sea of Fire take 10d10 fire damage and ongoing 15 fire damage (save ends).

Dikes: The eroded stone dikes that protect the island are 20 feet high (Athletics DC 16 to climb).

Stile: The steps that climb up and over the dikes are difficult terrain.



Galleries

Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

Setup

2 storm abishai snipers (S)
1 githyanki warrior (G)
1 centaur ravager (C)
1 arctide spiralith (A)

The exterior of the 200-foot-high monolith tower is smooth-sided, polished obsidian (Athletics DC 30 to climb). Its only entrance is a single gate that opens into the upper portion of an inverse gallery. This chamber drops in a series of stepped ledges to a reservoir of blood chaos that covers the floor. This access point is guarded by more of Sarshan's servants.

When the PCs can see into this area, read:
This cavernous chamber drops 50 feet to a vast reservoir of seething blood chaos. A series of stepped ledges work their way down the sides of the chamber, some connected by stairs, others by wooden ladders. Several ledges are decorated with statues. Straight across from the entrance and at the same level, a ledge contains the glowing sigils of a permanent teleportation circle.

The defenders of this chamber stand in wait—two humanoid fiends with leathery wings, another githyanki warrior, a centaur bearing a greatsword, and a demon ensconced in a rune-scribed shell.

In the second round of combat, the tower shudders as the foundations of the island are inundated with inflowing lava.

At the beginning of the second round of combat, read:

A groaning roar suddenly shakes the tower. The seething blood chaos below begins to boil as a jet of magma shoots into the reservoir through a wide-gaping crack in the wall. Foul-smelling steam vents upward as the level of the swirling pool begins to rise.

Refer to "Features of the Area" for information on how the lava and the blood chaos interact, and for the speed at which the chamber fills.

2 Storm Abishai Snipers (S)		**Level 12 Artillery**
Medium immortal magical beast		XP 700
Initiative +9	**Senses** Perception +23; low-light vision	
HP 98; **Bloodied** 49		
Regeneration 5		
AC 24; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 22		
Resist 10 lightning, 10 thunder		
Speed 8, fly 6, overland flight 12		
⊕ **Lightning Sting** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**		
+19 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 lightning damage.		
↯ **Lightning Discharge** (immediate reaction, when an enemy hits the abishai with a melee attack; encounter) ✦ **Lightning**		
Close burst 1; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 8 lightning damage, and the triggering enemy is pushed 1 square and stunned until the end of its next turn.		
✧ **Shockbolt** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**		
Area burst 2 within 10; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 8 thunder damage.		
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic		
Str 18 (+20)	**Dex** 16 (+9)	**Wis** 13 (+7)
Con 20 (+11)	**Int** 11 (+6)	**Cha** 21 (+11)

Tactics

The creatures here seek to prevent the PCs from reaching the portal on the 50-foot-high ledge across from the entry, even as the slurry of blood chaos and magma begins to rise.

The storm abishai snipers use their *shockbolts* as they weave through melee, hoping that their *lightning discharge* allows them to push a PC into the magma slurry below.

The githyanki warrior harries defenders and strikers with silver greatsword attacks, reserving his *telekinetic leap* to jump up to another ledge as the magma slurry rises.

The centaur ravager begins with a *berserk rush*, then attacks the closest foes with greatsword attacks. It uses its *brash retaliation* and its recharged *berserk rush* to knock foes off the ledge and into the magma slurry.

The arctide spiralith stays in the thick of combat to make use of its *arcane arc*, alternating *focused strike* and *charged lightning burst* attacks.

Centaur Ravager (C) **Level 12 Brute**
Large fey humanoid XP 700

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +9; low-light vision
HP 150; **Bloodied** 75; see also *brash retaliation*
AC 24; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23
Speed 8

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Melee 1; +15 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, plus 1d10 damage when charging.

Quick Kick (immediate reaction, when a creature moves into a space where it flanks the centaur ravager; at-will)
Melee 1; targets the triggering creature; +14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage.

Berserk Rush (standard; usable only while wielding a greatsword; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**
Usable in place of a charge's melee basic attack; melee 1; +15 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 6 damage (plus 1d10 damage when charging), and the target is pushed 2 squares and knocked prone.

Brash Retaliation (free, when first bloodied; usable only while wielding a greatsword; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Melee 1; +15 vs. AC; 3d10 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Athletics +17, Nature +14
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+10) **Wis** 16 (+9)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 9 (+5) **Cha** 10 (+6)
Equipment greatsword

Arctide Spiralith (A) **Level 12 Artillery**
Large elemental magical beast (demon) XP 700

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 97; **Bloodied** 48; see also *bloodied shock*
AC 24; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23
Resist 15 variable (2/encounter)
Speed 7

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
Melee 1; +17 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage.

Arcane Arc (immediate interrupt, when an enemy moves adjacent to the arctide spiralith; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Melee 1; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 lightning damage.

Focused Strike (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 10; +19 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 5 lightning damage

Bloodied Shock (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Lightning**
Close burst 1; +15 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 lightning damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Charged Lightning Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Area burst 2 within 10; +15 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 lightning damage. The attack deals 1 extra lightning damage for each creature in the burst. Any ally damaged by the attack gains a +1 bonus to any recharge rolls at the start of its next turn. If the bonus causes a recharge roll to exceed six, the result is considered six.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Str 15 (+8) **Dex** 23 (+12) **Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 19 (+10) **Int** 7 (+4) **Cha** 12 (+7)

Githyanki Warrior (G) **Level 12 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 700**

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +12
HP 118; **Bloodied** 59
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5; see also telekinetic leap

⊕ **Silver Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 plus 1d6 psychic damage, and an extra 3d6 psychic damage if the target is immobilized.

Telekinetic Grasp (standard; encounter)
Ranged 5; Medium or smaller target; +15 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).

Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the githyanki warrior or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills History +9, Insight +12
Str 21 (+11) **Dex** 17 (+9) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 14 (+8) **Int** 12 (+7) **Cha** 13 (+7)
Equipment plate armor, silver greatsword

Features of the Area

Illumination: Everburning torches and bubbling magma fill the area with bright light.

Stairs: Creatures ascending the stairs treat them as difficult terrain.

Statues: These provide cover. A statue can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Ladders: These wooden ladders are safe to climb. However, a ladder catches fire when the lava reaches its base. A character can climb a burning ladder for the first 3 rounds, but takes 1d8 fire damage in the process. After 3 rounds, a burning ladder collapses into charred cinders if anyone tries to climb it.

Blood Chaos: When the PCs first enter, the lower section of this deep chamber is filled with blood chaos to a depth of 20 feet. This potent distillation of elemental energy burns inanimate objects and melts living flesh. A creature that enters or begins its turn in an area of blood chaos takes 2d6 + 3 acid and fire damage and is slowed (save ends).

Creatures in the blood chaos must use their swim speed or make a DC 10 Athletics check to move. They gain cover except against attacks from submerged enemies. Fighting in the blood chaos imposes a –2 penalty to attack rolls except with spears and crossbows. Powers that have the fire keyword take a –2 penalty to attack rolls.

Once magma begins to flow into the chamber from cracks in the foundation, the blood chaos becomes even more deadly (see below).

Rising Magma: At the beginning of the second round of combat, magma begins filling the chamber, rising at a rate of 5 feet per round. The magma level begins 5 feet below the lowest ledge. Ledges and ladders are submerged in the following order:

Round 3: 10-foot ledge, ladder to 30-foot ledge.

Round 4: 15-foot ledge, ladder to 25-foot ledge.

Round 6: 25-foot ledge, ladder to rear 50-foot ledge.

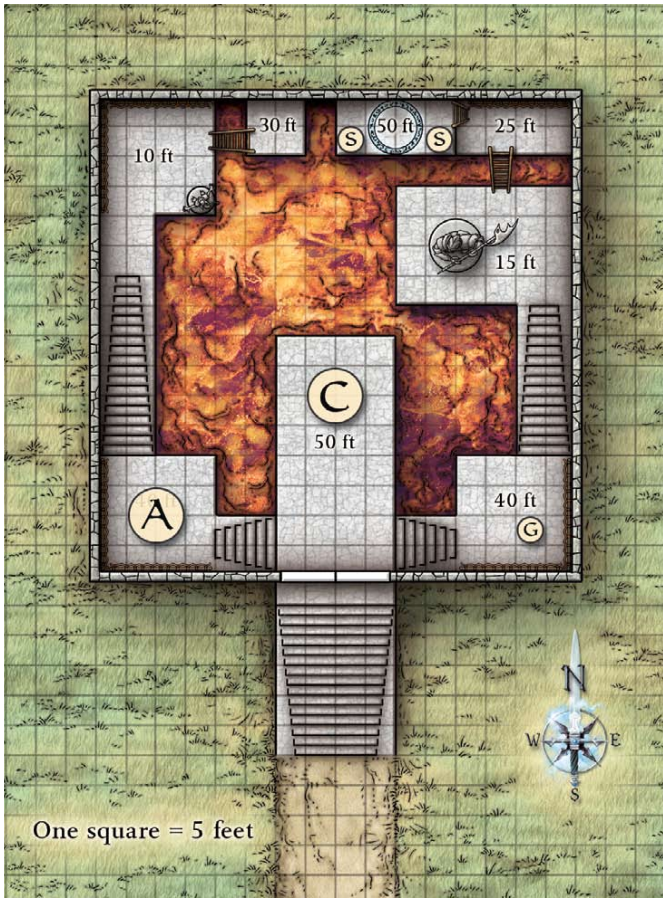
Round 7: 30-foot ledge.

Round 11: Both 40-foot ledges.

Round 13: The lava stops just short of the two 50-foot ledges.

Creatures that fall into the slurry of blood chaos and magma take 10d10 acid and fire damage and ongoing 15 acid and fire damage (save ends).

Teleportation Circle: This permanent teleportation circle has been set by Sarshan to send creatures to the teleportation circle in the next encounter. It cannot be reconfigured.



Crusher Rooms

Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

Setup

1 wailing ghost (banshee) (B)
1 lingering specter (S)
1 flesh golem (G)

Sarshan's reconfigured portal system leads PCs who enter the portal in the previous encounter to the permanent teleportation circle inscribed here. Unfortunately, the portal is one way. Once they enter this chamber, the PCs' only choice is to continue through it.

This L-shaped chamber consists of three subchambers, each set 5 feet lower than the next. Each section is 40 feet high. The southern section and the eastern section contain a crushing walls trap. The middle section contains a crushing ceiling trap.

When the PCs step off the teleportation circle, the first section's trap is triggered. Each time a creature steps into a new section, that section's trap is triggered. All three traps can be operational at the same time.

A banshee, a lingering specter, and a flesh golem also defend the chamber, making it difficult to simply bolt from one end to the other. However, none of these creatures are initially visible. The banshee and specter are beneath the floor, while the golem lingers out of sight around the corner.

The guardian creatures do not trigger the traps. The banshee and the specter can phase through the crushing walls and ceiling without harm. Once the traps are activated, the golem is subject to attack, but it stays with the PCs regardless.

When the PCs can see into this chamber, read:

This L-shaped chamber is bare stone except for the glowing sigils of the permanent teleportation circle within which you stand. The chamber is divided into three subchambers, each set 5 feet below the previous, but the far end of the last section cannot be seen.

Perception Check

DC 16: *Scratches mar the floor and ceiling, as if the walls have moved inward at some point, then back out.*

DC 21: *The dull echo of your footsteps suggests that hollow spaces lie beneath the floor.*

When the walls begin to move, read:

With a grinding of stone on stone, the walls of the subchamber lurch forward. At the same time, two ghostly forms shoot up from beneath the floorboards.

Wailing Ghost (Banshee) (B)	**Level 12 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 700
Initiative +8	**Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 91; **Bloodied** 45	
AC 23; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial	
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing	
⊕ **Spirit Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+15 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 2 necrotic damage.	
Death's Visage (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**	
Ranged 5; +15 vs. Will; 2d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).	
Terrifying Shriek (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**	
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +15 vs. Will; 2d8 + 3 psychic damage, the target is pushed 5 squares and is immobilized (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +13	
Str 14 (+8)	**Dex** 15 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 13 (+7)	**Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 17 (+9)

Tactics

The flesh golem makes *double attacks* to daze targets, hindering their advance across the trapped chamber.

The banshee uses its *terrifying shriek* as often as possible, immobilizing PCs and pushing them back into the area of an activated trap.

The specter uses *spectral barrage* as often as possible, falling back on spectral touch attacks while that power recharges.

The ghost and the specter ignore the walls, passing through and behind them to confound the PCs.

Crushing Walls and Ceiling **Level 12 Blaster**
Trap XP 700

As you step off the portal, the walls suddenly lurch forward and begin to press in.

Trap: The first and third sections of the chamber are crushing walls traps, while the middle section is a crushing ceiling trap. All sections are activated individually.

Perception

✦ DC 16: Scratches in the floors and ceiling make it look as if the walls have moved inward at some point, then back out.

Initiative +2 (roll separately for each section)

Trigger

The chamber is divided into three sections. Each section is triggered when a creature enters the area while standing on the floor.

Special

The southern section has crushing walls, the central section has a crushing ceiling, and the eastern section has crushing walls. The walls move inward every other turn, while the ceiling moves downward every turn. The walls meet each other and the ceiling meets the floor in the eighth round, assuming no countermeasures are taken.

Attack

Standard Action **Melee**

Targets: Creatures in the area of each section of the trap.

Once triggered, the walls in the southern and eastern sections move inward 1 square every other turn. Once triggered, the ceiling in the central area moves down 1 square every turn. Creatures adjacent to a wall are pushed 1 square. When the crushing walls come together, or when the ceiling meets the floor, all creatures in the area are slowed and are subject to an attack.

The walls and floor stay in this position for 3 rounds, then move back at 1 square per round and reset.

Attack: +15 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 3d6 + 6 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Miss: Half damage.

Countermeasures

✦ A character adjacent to a wall can delay the trigger 1 round with a DC 16 Thievery check.

✦ A character adjacent to a moving wall can delay its movement for 1 round with a DC 21 Thievery check.

✦ A character adjacent to a moving wall or who is tall enough to reach the moving ceiling can prevent the wall or ceiling's movement with a DC 16 Strength check (DC 21 if the walls are 1 square apart). All characters in the area can aid the character making this check.

✦ The floors are riddled with niches under secret sliding trapdoors (Perception DC 21). Opening a trapdoor is a minor action, while slipping into it is a move action. The floor contains one niche per square. Each niche can be occupied by one creature.

A PC in a niche can ride out the crushing walls and ceiling. However, upon leaving a niche and stepping onto the floor again, the section of the trap the PC stands in is triggered once more.

Lingering Specter (S) **Level 12 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) **XP 700**

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision

Spectral Chill (Cold) aura 1; enemies in the aura take a -2 penalty to all defenses.

HP 66; **Bloodied** 33

AC 26; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23

Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic, insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing

⊕ **Spectral Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+15 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 5 necrotic damage.

Spectral Barrage (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Illusion, Psychic**
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +15 vs. Will; 3d6 psychic damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Invisibility (standard; at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
The specter becomes invisible until it attacks or until it is hit by an attack.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common

Skills Stealth +17

Str 19 (+10) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 16 (+9) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 19 (+10)

Flesh Golem (G) **Level 12 Elite Brute**
Large natural animate (construct) XP 1,400

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +5; darkvision

HP 304; **Bloodied** 152; see also *berserk attack*

AC 26; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22

Saving Throws +2

Speed 6; can't shift

Action Points 1

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC (+18 while bloodied); 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
The flesh golem makes two slam attacks.

Berserk Attack (immediate reaction, when damaged by an attack while bloodied; at-will)
The flesh golem makes a slam attack against a random target within its reach.

Golem Rampage (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞)
The flesh golem moves up to its speed plus 2 and can move through enemies' spaces, provoking opportunity attacks as normal. When it enters a creature's space (ally or enemy), the golem makes a slam attack against that creature. The creature remains in its space, and the golem must leave the space after it attacks. The golem must end its rampage in an unoccupied space.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 20 (+11) **Dex** 7 (+4) **Wis** 8 (+5)
Con 22 (+12) **Int** 3 (+2) **Cha** 3 (+2)

Development

As soon as the PCs pass through the double doors in the eastern chamber, they are teleported to the roof of the tower. Go to the "Final Battle" encounter on page 45.

Features of the Area

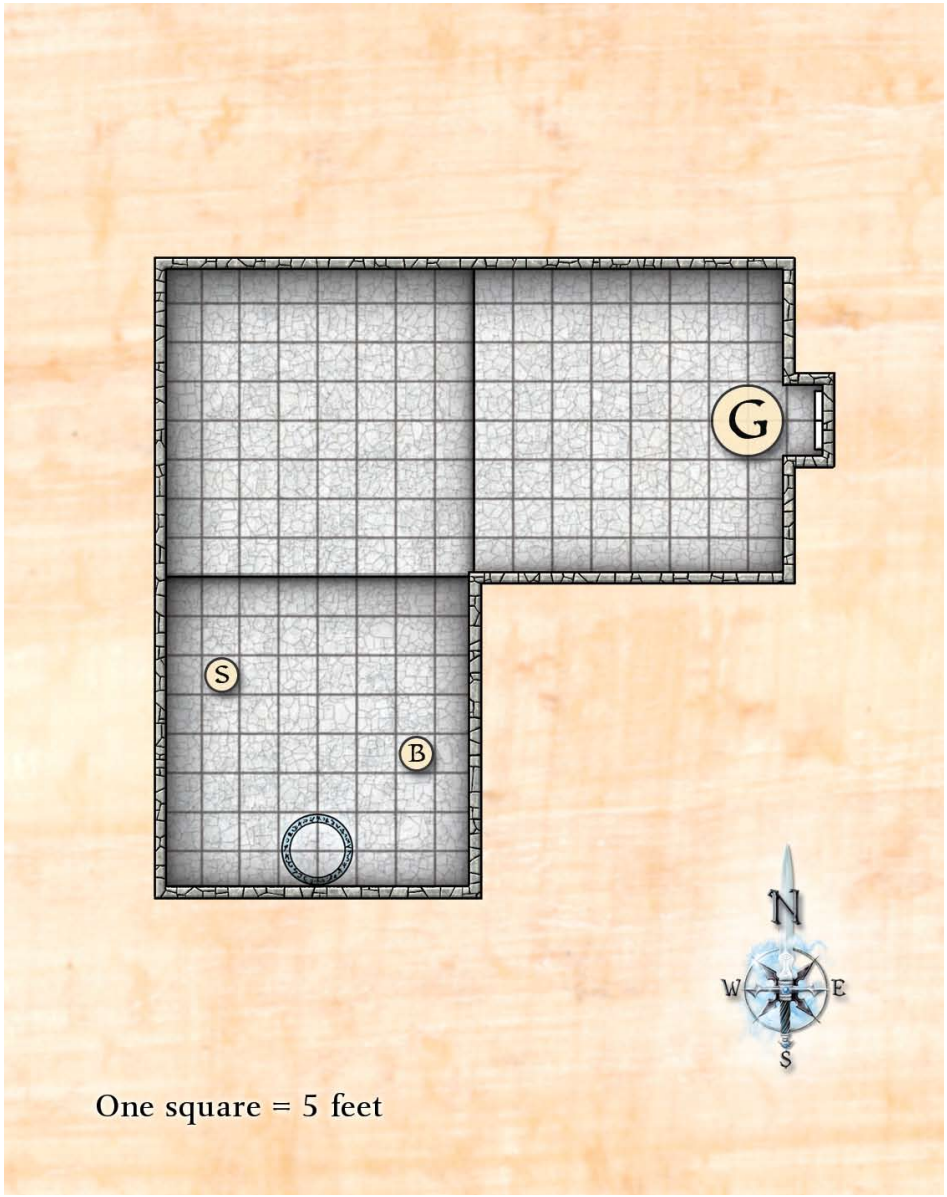
Illumination: Dark.

Crushing Walls and Ceiling: See the trap statistics block.

Niches Beneath the Floor: See "Countermeasures" in the trap statistics block.

Teleportation Circle: This permanent teleportation circle leads from the previous encounter to this chamber. Sarshan has configured the portal for one-way access into this area. However, a PC who spends 10 minutes and succeeds on five DC 21 Arcana checks can reconfigure the portal to take the PCs back to the galleries.

Double Doors: The double doors on the eastern side of the chamber are set in an alcove that provides enough space for two Medium creatures to avoid the crushing walls. The double doors are locked (Thievery DC 16 to open; Strength check 21 to break). Anyone who walks through the doors appears in the teleportation circle inscribed on the open roof of the monolith in the "Final Battle" encounter.



Final Battle

Encounter Level 16 (7,800 XP)

Setup

4 githyanki thugs (T)
3 githyanki warriors (W)
1 githyanki mindslicer (G)
2 shadar-kai warriors (K)
Sarshan (S)

After overcoming the tower's defenses, the PCs finally catch up with Sarshan. The shadar-kai knows the characters are in the tower, and despite holding the upper hand in their first meeting ("Shadow Rift of Umbraforge," *Dungeon 158*) he has come to fear their power. Sarshan's escape portal was damaged when he miscalculated the amount of power needed to open the portals that vented blood chaos into Elsir Vale. As the PCs arrive on the roof of the tower, he labors behind a force sphere to activate his escape route, two shadar-kai warriors at his side. A squad of githyanki stands on guard outside the sphere.

When the PCs arrive on the tower roof, read:

The top of the tower is guarded by eight warrior githyanki, all bearing silver greatswords. Their leader wields a sliver longsword, eyes flashing with mystic power. On the far side of a tower, a sphere of translucent force protects three figures: Sarshan and two shadar-kai bodyguards. However, the scars that the arms dealer bore when you saw him in Umbraforge pale in comparison to his current state. The shadar-kai's skin seethes and bubbles as tendrils of blood chaos erupt from open sores on his face and hands. Within the protective force sphere, he works intently over a teleportation circle, attempting to activate its power.

Arcana Check

DC 16: *The teleportation circle has been prepared for a Linked Portal ritual—one that Sarshan is only minutes away from completing.*

4 Githyanki Thugs (T) — **Level 12 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 175

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +6
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 24; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 21
Speed 5
⨁ **Silver Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+15 vs. AC; 6 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 21 (+11) **Dex** 11 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+6)
Con 21 (+11) **Int** 11 (+6) **Cha** 13 (+7)
Equipment silver greatsword

3 Githyanki Warriors (W) — **Level 12 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 700

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +12
HP 118; **Bloodied** 59
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5; see also telekinetic leap
⨁ **Silver Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 plus 1d6 psychic damage, and an extra 3d6 psychic damage if the target is immobilized.
Telekinetic Grasp (standard; encounter)
Ranged 5; Medium or smaller target; +15 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).
Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the githyanki warrior or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills History +9, Insight +12
Str 21 (+11) **Dex** 17 (+9) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 14 (+8) **Int** 12 (+7) **Cha** 13 (+7)
Equipment plate armor, silver greatsword

Githyanki Mindslicer (G) — **Level 13 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 800

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +12
HP 98; **Bloodied** 49
AC 27; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 6; see also *telekinetic leap*
⨁ **Silver Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 plus 1d8 psychic damage.
Mindslice (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +16 vs. Will; 2d8 + 3 psychic damage.
Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the githyanki mindslicer or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.
Psychic Barrage (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Area burst 1 within 20; +16 vs. Will; 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 psychic damage and cannot use daily or encounter powers (save ends both).
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills History +11, Insight +12
Str 14 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+9) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 14 (+8) **Int** 17 (+9) **Cha** 11 (+6)
Equipment robes, overcoat, silver longsword

2 Shadar-Kai Warriors (K) — **Level 8 Soldier**
Medium shadow humanoid — XP 350

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision
HP 86; **Bloodied** 43
AC 24; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 17
Speed 5; see also *shadow jaunt*
⨁ **Katar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+13 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage (crit 1d6 + 9).
Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The shadar-kai warrior makes two katar attacks.
Cage of Gloom (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
The shadar-kai warrior makes a katar attack. If the attack hits, the shadar-kai warrior makes a secondary attack as strands of shadow coil around the target. *Secondary Attack:* +11 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (save ends).
Shadow Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The shadar-kai warrior teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +15, Stealth +15
Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 11 (+4)
Equipment shadowmail, 2 katars

Sarshan (S)	**Level 12 Solo Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid, shadar-kai	XP 3,500
Initiative +10	**Senses** Perception +15; low-light vision
Blood Chaos aura 2; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes ongoing 10 acid damage (save ends).	
HP 650; **Bloodied** 325	
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 25	
Resist 20 acid	
Saving Throws +5	
Speed 6; see also *shadow attack*	
Action Points 2	
Katar (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** +17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).	
Triple Attack (standard; at-will) Sarshan makes three katar attacks.	
Shadow Attack (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Teleportation** Sarshan teleports 6 squares, makes a *triple attack* and teleports 6 more squares, then becomes insubstantial until the start of his next turn.	
Blood Chaos Flare (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid** Close blast 5; +16 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 10 acid damage (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is slowed and takes ongoing 10 acid damage (save ends). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target is transformed into a mass of slime (treat as petrified; no save). The Remove Affliction ritual can reverse this effect.	
Chaos Nova (standard; recharge ⁞⁞) ✦ Acid Close burst 1; +15 vs. Fortitude; 4d10 + 5 acid damage. *Miss:* Half damage.	
Chaos Scream (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Acid** Sarshan makes a *blood chaos flare* attack.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Elven, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +23, Diplomacy +23	
Str 31 (+16)	**Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 18 (+10)
Con 26 (+14)	**Int** 17 (+9) **Cha** 17 (+9)

Tactics

The githyanki defenders outside the force sphere attempt to stop the PCs from interrupting Sarshan's work. The githyanki thugs flank with silver greatsword attacks against defenders and strikers.

The githyanki warrior joins its thug allies to flank a powerful melee combatant, using *telekinetic grasp* to immobilize any PC attempting to batter down the force sphere.

The githyanki mindslicer stays at the edge of the fray, targeting controllers and ranged combatants with *psychic barrage* and *mindslice* attacks.

The shadar-kai warriors fight as a pair, flanking the most powerful looking melee combatant with *double attacks*. When that foe is brought down, they split up to make *cage of gloom* attacks on separate PCs, hitting with *double attacks* while *cage of gloom* recharges.

Pushed to the brink, Sarshan abandons his plan to flee as he joins the fray. His exposure to blood chaos has granted him potent abilities, which he uses to maximum advantage from behind the protection of the force sphere (see "Features of the Area"). He uses *blood chaos flare* from within the force sphere, engaging a controller or defender with *shadow attack* and *triple attack* once the sphere falls.

Two-Stage Fight

This high-level encounter is designed to push the PCs to the limit, and Sarshan's last stand promises to be a memorable fight. However, if the PCs are down on healing surges and daily powers (and especially if they have not yet attained 12th level), consider splitting this encounter into two separate combats, with the second beginning only after the force sphere is successfully brought down. In this optional encounter format, Sarshan and his shadar-kai guards ignore the PCs at first, trusting the githyanki to deal with the party while Sarshan activates his escape portal. When the force sphere is brought down, all the shadar-kai join in the fray.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright daylight.

Tower Top: 3-foot high crenellations run around the edge of the tower, granting a +2 bonus to saving throws made to avoid falling off. A creature that falls off the tower takes 20d10 damage.

Force Sphere: This translucent sphere is an invisible wall of force that protects Sarshan and his shadar-kai warriors. Creatures can pass out of the sphere but not into it. Once the shadar-kai warriors enter the fray, they cannot return to the sphere's protection.

The sphere prevents all weapons, powers, and effects from reaching Sarshan, but the shadar-kai can make *blood chaos flare* attacks through the sphere against the PCs.

As the force sphere is not subject to dispel magic, brute force is the quickest way to bring it down: AC/Reflex 2, Fortitude 20, 500 hit points. If the PCs simply wait, Sarshan concludes his ritual after 2 minutes (20 rounds) and teleports away to a redoubt in the City of Brass.

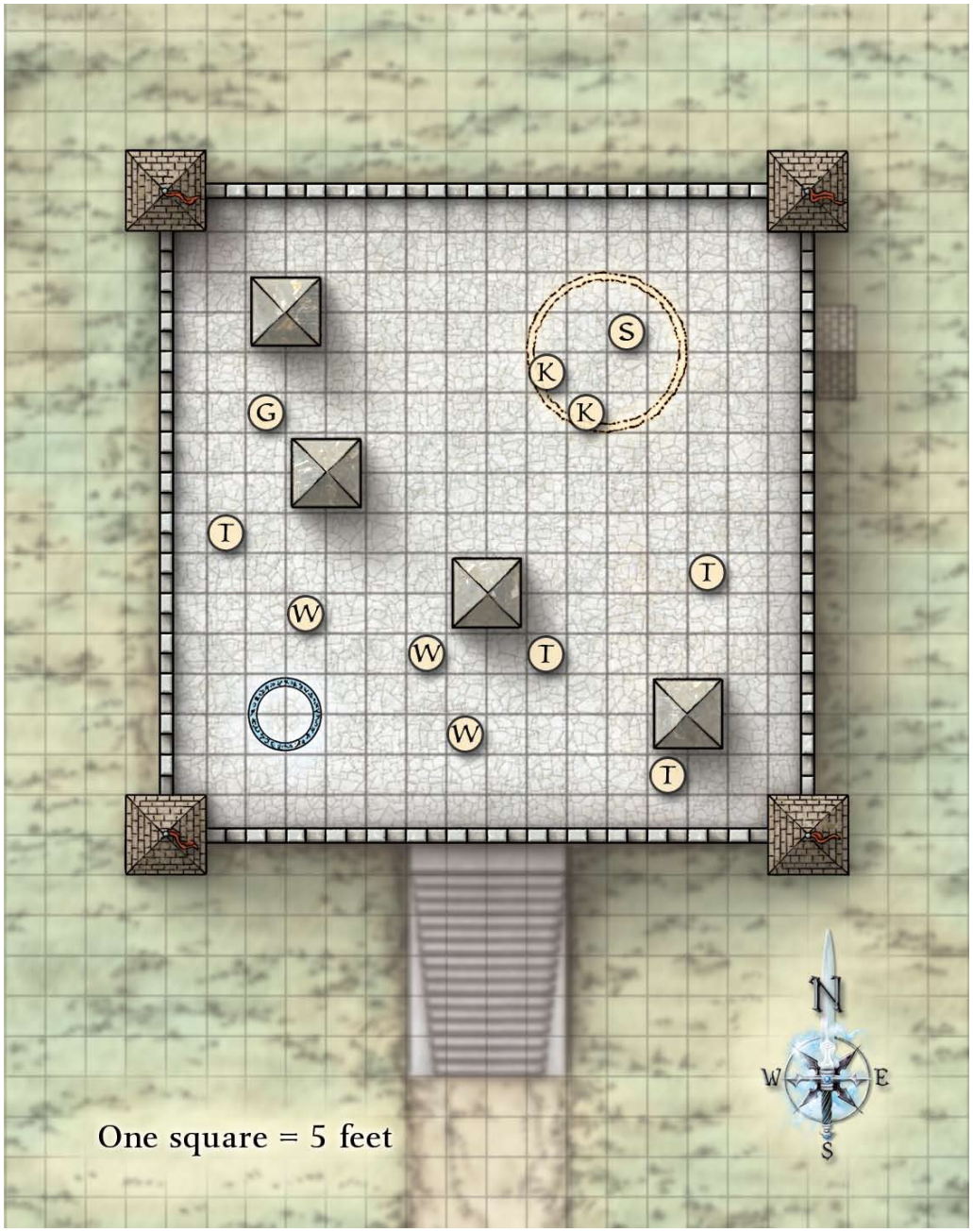
Teleportation Circle: This permanent teleportation circle teleports the PCs from the teleportation circle in the "Crusher Rooms" encounter.

Treasure: Sarshan has packed all the easily accessible loot from this lair into a large chest that sits within the teleportation circle. The PCs can claim 4,000 gp, one level 13 magic item, one level 14 magic item, and one level 16 magic item.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the battle, the PCs can search through Sarshan's belongings to discover confirmation of the shadar-kai's plots against the Freeriders and Elsir Vale. Sarshan's notes and journals indicate that he fled to the Elemental Chaos after the fall of his fortress at Umbraforge, discovering Djamela's island during his travels. After saving the island from the raging lava sea, the shadar-kai found fragments of the old efreet mage's work, and had soon completed her dangerous research.

When this encounter is over, the characters have the opportunity to begin a journey back to Overlook—a likely destination. You can feel free to allow that journey to happen, or you can jump right into "The Bitter Glass," the next installment in the Scales of War Adventure Path. The events at the beginning of "The Bitter Glass" will take place near the outskirts of Overlook, but they can also easily happen at any point during the characters journey overland through Elsir Vale or any other part of the world.



Appendix: Creatures of Blood Chaos

Blood chaos is an incredibly destructive force, but occasionally when it consumes sentient creatures, it warps and transforms them into new forms.

Creatures of blood chaos are normally encountered in the world nearby or in flows of blood chaos. In such rare encounters, normally only a few such creatures are encountered. Upon the elemental chaos, however, legions of them gather near massive lakes of blood chaos.

Chaos Mauler

Creatures of elemental destruction, chaos maulers are ruled by their primal instinct to smash and destroy. Willing servants of scions of chaos, chaos maulers are created when particularly evil or violent creatures are consumed by blood chaos. Such a creature's essence infuses the surrounding blood chaos birthing it in a new, terrifying form. In many cases, a small portion of the original creature's form survives this "rebirth," providing some small clue as to its origin.

Most chaos maulers appear as large, hulking creature composed entirely of frozen orange-purple liquid. Its head is mainly featureless and a single thick tentacle grows from its belly.

Chaos Mauler **Level 11 Minion**
Large elemental animate **XP 150**

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +7
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC 23; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Speed 6

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +14 vs. AC; 8 fire damage

Liquid Body
The chaos mauler is perfectly adapted to living in blood chaos. It can move through blood chaos without penalty and takes no damage from contact with blood chaos.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 23 (+11)	**Dex** 18 (+9)	**Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 16 (+8)	**Int** 11 (+5)	**Cha** 16 (+8)

Chaos Mauler Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 25: Chaos maulers are the most destructive of the creatures spawned by blood chaos. Creatures driven by an unquenchable rage, they batter their opponents to death.

DC 30: Chaos maulers are often encountered with other spawn of blood chaos. In particular, skulking terrors use their unsophisticated attacks as a distraction.

Chaos Mauler Tactics

Chaos maulers tactics are simple ñ they move toward the nearest opponent and pound it to destruction before moving on to their next target. If they face no opposition, they incinerate any nearby flammable objects.

Scion of Chaos

Creatures of chaos and entropy, scions of chaos lurk within blood chaos, striking out at any who venture too close.

Scions of chaos spawn when an area of blood chaos has consumed enough sentient beings. When such creatures die, a small part of their being infuses the blood chaos. Scions of chaos are intelligent, bloodthirsty foes driven by their desire to grow their numbers by consuming intelligent prey.

These malignant creatures appear as undulating orb of melted and mottled orange and purple flesh writhing upon a bed of small, muscular tentacles. A ring of larger tentacles juts from the top of the orb.

Scion of Chaos **Level 11 Controller**
Huge elemental animate **XP 600**

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +9
Whirling Tentacles aura 2; the scion of chaos slides any creature that starts its turn in the aura 2 squares.
HP 117; **Bloodied** 58
AC 25; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24
Resist acid 10, fire 10
Speed 6

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 3; +16 vs. AC; 2d8+4 fire damage

⊕ **Staggering Strike** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 10; +14 vs. Fortitude; 2d6+6 damage and the target is pushed 3 squares.

✦ **Coils of Immobility** (standard; recharge ⚄,⚅)
Area burst 2 within 10; targets enemies only; +13 vs. Reflex; 2d8+4 damage and the target is restrained (save ends)

Liquid Body
The scion of chaos is perfectly adapted to living in blood chaos. It can move through blood chaos without penalty and takes no damage from contact with blood chaos.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 17 (+8)	**Dex** 19 (+9)	**Wis** 19 (+9)
Con 21 (+10)	**Int** 16 (+8)	**Cha** 21 (+10)

Scion of Chaos Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 25: Scions of chaos are spawned from the fragments of sentient beings consumed by blood chaos.

DC 30: Scions of chaos can lash out with parts of their body to immobilize their enemies and are immune to corrosion and flame.

Scion of Chaos Tactics

Scions of chaos prefer to hang back from melee, using *coils of immobility* to inhibit their foes tactical movements. If pressed, they use *staggering strike* to push enemies away and when cornered lash out with their mighty fists.

Skulking Terror

Aptly named, skulking terrors are sinuous creatures of sudden ambush and merciless assault. Silent predators, they can glide through or above flows of blood chaos in search of prey. Skulking terrors much prefer to take their prey unaware and are the most cowardly of the blood chaos creatures. Skulking terrors will temporarily retreat if clearly overmatched, but often return when their opponents least expect it.

They are ribbed paper-thin creature that vaguely resembles a headless, flattened orange and purple bat. They drip thick viscous ichor in their wake from a number of small holes on their underside.

Skulking Terror	**Level 11 Lurker**
Medium elemental animate	**XP 600**
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +11
HP 83; **Bloodied** 41	
AC 25; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21	
Speed 6, fly 6	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+16 vs. AC; 2d6+6 damage	
↭ **Lethargic Countenance** (standard action; at-will)	
Close burst 3; +12 vs. Will; the target is slowed and grants combat advantage to the skulking terror until the end of the skulking terror's next turn. After all attacks are resolved, the skulking terror teleports 8 squares and gains a +4 power bonus to all defenses against ranged and area attacks.	
Combat Advantage	
The skulking terror deals an extra 2d6 damage on melee attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.	
Liquid Body	
The skulking terror is perfectly adapted to living in blood chaos. It can move through blood chaos without penalty and takes no damage from contact with blood chaos.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+7)	**Dex** 19 (+9)	**Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 11 (+5)	**Int** 13 (+6)	**Cha** 12 (+6)

Skulking Terror Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 25: Skulking terrors are perfectly at home in flows of blood chaos and often use them to get closer to their foes. Their attacks can slow down their opponents, making them easier targets.

DC 30: Skulking terrors retreat from battle if injured or outnumbered but always return at a time of their choosing to defeat their prey.

Skulking Terror Tactics

Skulking terrors prefer to strike from ambush, seeking combat advantage against a foe whenever possible. To this end, they hide in blood chaos flows or swoop silently down from above on unsuspecting targets. Masters of hit and run tactics, they use *lethargic countenance* to slow opponents. If badly injured, or obviously outnumbered, they flee to return at an advantageous moment.

About the authors

Creighton Broadhurst lives in Torquay, England where, apparently, the palm trees are plastic and the weather is warm. He shares a ramshackle old mansion with his two children ("Genghis" and "Khan") and his very patient wife. He is famed locally for his enduring love affair with booze and pizza. A huge Greyhawk® fan he has just miraculously survived the terrors of the Temple of Elemental Evil and is now bravely investigating a certain ruined house outside Saltmarsh. His freelance credits include work with Wizards of the Coast, Paizo, and Expeditious Retreat Press. You can check out his blog at http://raging-swan.livejournal.com.

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PARAGON
11-20

Brink of Madness

by Robert J. Schwalb

The world is imperiled. An insane wizard works to rip open a hole in reality to unleash the Far Realm's abominations and plunge the world into madness and despair. If he succeeds, chaotic energy washes across the world, altering all it touches. There isn't time to raise armies, not a moment to call forth the gods' servants, so close the wizard is to achieving his goal. It falls to a band of courageous adventurers to stand once more against the horrors of what lies beyond.

illustrations by Michael Komarck and Marc Sasso
cartography by Mike Schley

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"Brink of Madness" is the third and final chapter of *The Tear of Ioun,* a three-part adventure arc for the Dungeons & Dragons Roleplaying game. This adventure assumes the players played through "Touch of Madness" and "Depths of Madness," making this scenario the conclusion of the arc. The adventure is designed for a party of five 13th-level PCs.

Adventure Background

In an earlier age, the Kaorti were an order of priests dedicated to scholarship and Ioun. Into their possession was given an artifact known as the *Tear of Ioun.* The shining stone was a vessel of vast knowledge, and the Kaorti studied and protected it.

Volarn, a charismatic priest of the order, sought all sorts of knowledge, even that of the forbidden sort. He came to believe that the *Tear of Ioun* could be used to open a portal to one of the greatest mysteries of existence—the Far Realm. He carefully executed a plan to explore the Far Realm, arrogantly believing his brilliant mind had thought of every needed protection and every contingency, but no mortal mind—however brilliant—can truly comprehend the Far Realm.

The priest built an orrery powered by the *Tear of Ioun* and succeeded in opening a portal to the Far Realm. Volarn and his followers then stepped through the gate. However, the orrery failed, and the *Tear of Ioun* absorbed the energy of the Far Realm, irrevocably corrupting it. In the end, the orrery exploded and all but destroyed the temple housing it. The Kaorti name became a curse among those of Ioun's followers who knew the truth. History passed into legend and out of mind.

Since they first fell, the Kaorti reached beyond the planar boundaries in the hopes of securing mortal aid to release them. Each time, their psychic touch ruined rather than cultivated potential helpers, leaving insane husks. It would take a person of Volarn's caliber to apprehend the fullness of the Far Realm's promise, and so Volarn scoured the world for a descendant.

Volarn found Malachi a dozen years ago, and Volarn saw the potential within his descendant. The Kaorti lord worked through Malachi's dreams, caressing his mind and twisting his intellect until madness welled up. Malachi's fears diminished. Confidence and deranged hunger to behold the Outside clouded his every thought. The wizard became Volarn's willing servant, turning his magic toward Far Realm studies, becoming what he called an "alienist."

Straightaway, Malachi built a laboratory in the frozen north, excavating old tunnels beneath an abandoned fortress to house his workshops and garrison. He gathered servants, brokered alliances, and recruited soldiers. Then he began to eliminate rivals and recover the components he needed to complete his mission.

Just as Volarn had done, Malachi constructed an orrery to probe the folds in time and space for a gap he could open to allow the Kaorti an escape. Malachi also knew he needed a source of divine power—the *Tear of Ioun*—but the relic had been lost since the Kaorti's ill-fated journey. With no idea where the artifact hid, Malachi sent his servants to scour the world for signs of its presence. When they picked up the trail, they were to use a special lead vessel to carry the object safely back to Malachi's lair at the top of the world.

Malachi's servants have ever been a fractious lot. Infighting and treachery slowed their searching. Each sought the honor of locating the artifact first, so they spent as much time looking for the stone as they did putting obstacles in one another's paths. Weeks turned into months, and months into years.

It was a stroke of luck, then, that Malachi's apprentice Cylus located the *Tear.* Fearing treachery from his fellow servants, he hired a band of adventurers to retrieve the item and return it to him using the strongbox he gave them. Thusly were the events described in "Touch of Madness" and "Depths of Madness" set in motion.

After betrayals, setbacks, and interference by a new group of heroes, Malachi's minions finally came into possession of the *Tear.* They race across the Shadowfell to a portal known as the Gloaming Gate. The portal carries them to Malachi's Fortress at World's End. There they hope to present the relic to their master and usher in the world's final days.

Adventure Synopsis

This adventure picks up right after the end of "Depths of Madness." The PCs know Malachi's servants flee through the Shadowfell. To stand a chance at stopping the alienist, the characters must follow. If the PCs used their resources wisely, they know exactly where their foes are heading. If not, the heroes can still pick up the trail and track the thieves to the Gloaming Gate, and ultimately, the Fortress at World's End.

After coming through the Gloaming Gate, the PCs find themselves on a sheet of ice, far below the shelf that holds the Fortress at Worlds End. They must win past Malachi's guardians and traps to stop the depraved wizard. If they're too late, the characters must find a way to contain the damage.

Adventure Hooks

Players who played through "Touch of Madness" and "Depths of Madness" already have incentive to pursue this story. You can run this adventure by itself, however. Consider using any of the following adventure hooks, although Wellspring's Cry is the most straightforward of the three.

Kidnapping Attempt: Malachi's servants attempt to abduct the PCs as a gift to their master. Malachi plans to transform such powerful individuals into monstrous servants implanted with Far Realm entities. The PCs defeat the attackers, or fall prey to them but eventually escape. From these foes, living (interrogation) or dead (Speak with Dead), the heroes can learn of Malachi's plans and the horror of the *Tear of Ioun*. They also learn the locations of the Gloaming Gate and Fortress at World's End.

Dire Omens: A strange wind whips up, carrying with it a foul corruption. Animals sicken and die, people develop unusual corruptions of the flesh and mind, and odd lights appear in the far north. Auguries reveal the terrible danger and the force behind the threat—Malachi and the *Tear of Ioun*. A patron, friend, or even an old enemy seeks the PCs out, urging them to deal with the alienist and his minions before it's too late.

Wellspring's Cry: Devastated in the wake of the chaos the *Tear of Ioun* created, the town of Wellspring is in need of heroes. Lord Criswell, the local ruler, spares no expense to send for those worthy to deal with the threat. Through an authority linked to the PCs, he contacts the characters. So the characters can come quickly, the lord also pays for a Linked Portal ritual and allows the party to use the permanent teleportation circle hidden in Castle Criswell. Within the town's temple to Ioun—the Mindspire, where Malachi's servants seized the *Tear of Ioun*—an active shadow crossing still exists. In an active shadow crossing, the barrier between the world and Shadowfell is open. (An inactive shadow crossing is where the barrier is merely thin.) Through this rift, the PCs can cross into the Shadowfell without the use of a ritual or magic item. From there, they can track Malachi's servants. The shadow crossing stays active as long as necessary for the purpose of the adventure. If you want to give the adventurers some incentive for a quick trip, consider having the crossing start to close, or otherwise impose a time constraint as you see fit.

If you lack maps of Wellspring and its environs, you can download them from the Dungeon 161 Gallery http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/4map/20081224

Treasure

The treasure in this adventure is for you to decide, based on your campaign's needs and PC wish lists. What the adventure does suggest is where you might place parcels.

Characters who start this adventure right at 13th level should be almost all the way to 15th level by the end of the adventure. You'll need to give out all the parcels for level 13 and around eight of those for level 14. See *Dungeon Master's Guide* page 127 for information on those parcels.

The following list shows where parcels appear in the adventure. Take time to assign parcels before running the adventure. Assign 14th-level treasure to tougher encounters likely to occur later in the adventure. You might also want to assign magic item parcels to NPCs, so the NPCs can use those items against the PCs.

Treasure Locations

Encounter A (Ghostly Choir): One parcel
Encounter D (Back From Nightmare): Two parcels
Encounter 7 (False Orrery): One parcel
Encounter 9 (Demon Pit): One parcel
Encounter 14 (Treasure Room): Four parcels
Encounter 20 (Malachi's Chambers): Two parcels
Encounter 21 (Library): Two parcels.
Encounter 22 (Nessian Shrine): Two parcels
Encounter 23 (Bleeding Universe): Three parcels

Quest: Destroy the *Tear of Ioun*

Players who have played the other adventures in this series know the *Tear of Ioun* is corrupted and corrupting. They know that possessing the horrifying artifact for even a short time leads to madness and mutation. The only real option is to destroy it. Unless you decide otherwise, it is important that players understand this fact before they have to deal with the stone in the encounter with Malachi. Characters who find the artifact and destroy it complete a 14th-level major quest worth 5,000 XP to the group.

Getting Started

Using the active shadow crossing within the Mindspire in Wellspring is the best way to follow Malachi's lackeys. It's free, and it puts the PCs directly on the right path. Supposing the PCs don't use the active shadow crossing, they have a couple other options for entering the Shadowfell. Those who use these other means still have the encounters in this adventure, unless you wish to add your own.

Blackgate Rune

Characters who completed "Depths of Madness" should possess one or more of these items. Alternatively, a patron such as Lord Criswell can provide one or two for the PCs to use on this mission. (Lord Criswell likely acquired the items from the few of Malachi's soldiers whom Wellspring's guards managed to defeat.) The PCs can easily purchase one or more of these consumables instead.

Blackgate Rune **Level 12**

This glossy black stone bears a complex sigil etched on its surface.

Consumable 520 gp

Power (Consumable ✦ Teleportation): Standard Action. You open a portal between corresponding places in the Shadowfell and the world. The portal lasts for 3 rounds, or until you wish it to close (free action), whichever is less time.

Shadow Passage

The PCs need only find an inactive shadow crossing to use the Shadow Passage ritual (see below; originally from *Manual of the Planes* page 151). A patron might provide the ritual and pay the component cost. The PCs can instead turn to an NPC wizard for help or buy a ritual scroll.

Shadow Passage

Where shadows lie thick in the world, you can push aside the veil and step into the Shadowfell.

Level: 8
Category: Travel
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Instantaneous
Component Cost: 135 gp
Market Price: 680 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Religion (no check)

Use this ritual at a shadow crossing (see Wellspring's Cry or *Manual of the Planes* page 50). When you perform this ritual, you shift yourself and up to eight allies from the world to a corresponding location in the Shadowfell, or from the Shadowfell to a corresponding location in the world. The shadow crossing need not be active for Shadow Passage to work.

You remain in the Shadowfell until you leave by another means or you perform this ritual again at a shadow crossing.

Special: Shadar-kai have a special connection to the Shadowfell. Consequently, a shadar-kai who has mastered this ritual or performs it from a scroll does not pay the component cost.

Into the Shadowfell

The Shadowfell is the dark echo of the natural world, containing many of the same features, places, and landmarks. In fact, some places in the Shadowfell are nearly identical to locations in the world, although cloaked in a gloomy pall.

Differences between the world and related locations in the Shadowfell are often disturbing. A town in the world might be a graveyard in the Shadowfell. Mountains could be worn to hills or replaced by plains. Roads might travel in the same direction, but gloom pervades them and hazards are far more sinister. Strange, chilling mists appear out of nowhere or hang over the landscape.

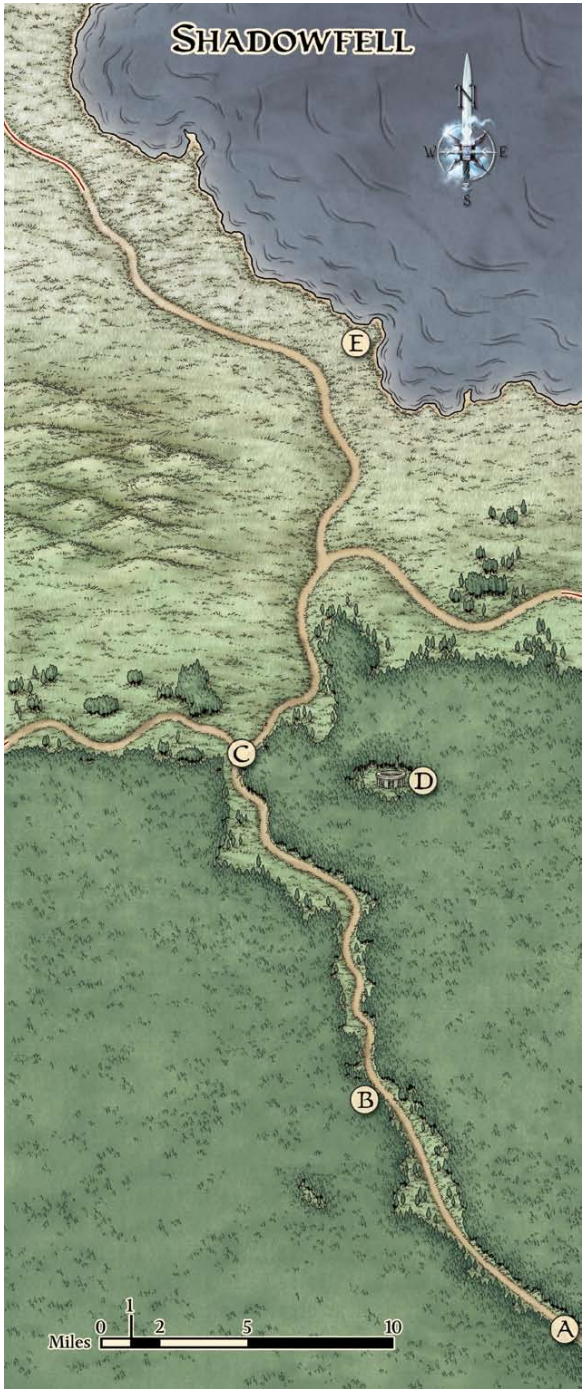
Here, the sun, moon, and stars are hidden or dim. Living creatures unused to the plane's environs feel uncomfortable, reminded of age, winter, and old injuries. Sadness and apathy begin to take hold in a traveler's mind.

Light

Outdoors during the day, the Shadowfell is full of dim light with darker shadows. At night, the darkness is almost physical, and nonmagical light sources illuminate only half the normal area on this plane.

Picking up the Trail

Characters can follow their enemies by tracking them from the shadow crossing in Wellspring. At this point, however, the PCs need not be seeking Malachi's soldiers directly. Indeed, the hook you have used might not make this possible, requiring the characters to proceed to the Gloaming Gate. Travel through the Shadowfell wilderness along the road is at a normal pace, but in the woods, the pace is 3/4 normal.



Gloaming Gate

In "Depths of Madness" the PCs should have learned of the gate and its location. Characters who start this adventure without playing through the others could have a similar advantage. Otherwise, knowing the location of the Gloaming Gate requires a DC 23 Arcana check or DC 25 History check. If they wish, the PCs can proceed to the gate without tracking their foes. Travel to the Gloaming Gate takes the PCs through the same territory even if they do not or cannot track those who bear the *Tear of Ioun* to Malachi's stronghold.

Fortress at World's End

The fortress is little known in the outside world, but a PC who succeeds on a DC 27 History check might know of it and its location in the north. Such a character might further know the place has a broader history.

History DC 32: The fortress has been in the frozen north, bordering the Shadowfell, since the days of Bael Turath. It was the home of a diabolic cult known as the Wrights of Nessus.

Tracking Malachi's Agents

This adventure assumes Malachi's servants have a lead on the PCs based on the developments of the previous adventure. Six humanoids entered the Shadowfell from within the Mindspire. They didn't expect the *Tear of Ioun* to leave an active shadow crossing where they made their escape. On the other side of the crossing, a DC 20 Perception check (+2 per day before the PCs follow) reveals tracks in the dust of the Mindspire's ruined shadow double. Each day, the tracker has to succeed on a similar check to continue following the tracks.

Catching Up: At the end the first successful day of tracking (traveling for the normal 10 hours), the PCs notice that Malachi's servants must be traveling at a forced march. Malachi's agents move along the road and in the woods at an average pace of 2-2/3 miles per hour for 17 hours a day—or about 45 miles per day. As the PCs learn this information, if they know the location of the Gloaming Gate, they quickly realize that the agents probably reached the gate on the first day. The PCs have little chance of catching up before the agents arrive at their master's citadel.

Nevertheless, the PCs can make chase at this forced pace if they want to do so. Doing so requires a DC 15 Endurance check (initial DC 17 for PCs who have a speed lower than 6; +2 to the DC for each hour after the eleventh). If a character succeeds on the check by 5 or more, he or she can assist one other PC. A failure costs the failing character a healing surge.

Losing the Trail: Any failure of Perception puts the PCs farther behind their quarry, supposing the tracker searches for the trail again. Doing so allows a retry on the Perception check every hour. That's an hour of travel lost for the day, and a situation that might open the party to random encounters in the Shadowfell. Three failures in a row means the PCs lose the trail altogether.

A. Arrival

The PCs arrive in the Shadowfell in this place. Describe their surroundings with the Shadowfell's gloomy nature in mind. The inside of the Mindspire, for instance, looks ancient, cracked, and rubble-strewn, its top felled by time. The benighted streets of a ruined and empty Wellspring soon give way to a menacing forest.

The road from Wellspring is in the Shadowfell, rutted and dilapidated. It leads north. Twisted trees extend for miles around it. Even atop a tree, a climber's view isn't much improved thanks to the mist hanging over the forest.

B. Death's Choir

A depraved ghost harpy lurks in the trees, watching the nearby road. The remains of her past victims linger among the trunks, some serving her whims and hungering for the living.

Tactical Encounter: Death's Choir (page 62).

C. Crossed Purposes

Where the roads meet, the dead point the way.

When the PCs can see the crossroads, read:

A crossroads lies ahead. A gallows stands in the center of the road, a slender cage hanging from it. Inside, a twitching corpse stands, eyeing your approach. As you move closer, it nods, groans, and extends a rotting arm to point to the east.

In a rasping voice, it says, "My master bids you come to the circle of stone, there to receive your reward for great deeds past."

As it finishes, the corpse exhales and slumps against the cage. Whatever animated it is gone.

The corpse says no more, and is in fact not a creature. It says what it has to say even if attacked (Defenses 20, 25 hp), unless the attacks destroy it first. The cage provides it cover.

Questioning the Dead: If the PCs use Speak With Dead on the corpse, it can reveal that Elomir, returned from death "by the Blood Lord," awaits the PCs in a circle of standing stones about 5 miles to the east. Elomir had a ritual that allowed him to use this corpse as a watcher and messenger, but the magic is done now. If the PCs didn't slay Elomir in "Touch of Madness," alter the story to fit your campaign. Perhaps another hated villain has returned from death to vex the PCs a final time.

Sidetracked: The tracks of Malachi's agents, of course, still lead north. This is a detour from the PCs' ultimate goal. However, if they don't deal with Elomir here, they might have to when they return from the Fortress at World's End. How that plays out is up to you, but Elomir still hungers for vengeance and possession of the *Tear of Ioun*.

D. Back From Nightmare

In death, Elomir made a deal with Orcus—a deal for immortality, power, and revenge. On part of the bargain was that he be given a chance to slay those who killed him. To that end, he made his way to an ancient stone circle to await the PCs.

Tactical Encounter: Back From Nightmare (page 64).

E. Gloaming Gate

Here, on the shore of the Umbral Sea, the Gloaming Gate connects the Shadowfell to the world at a point near the Fortress at Worlds End. Malachi's demonic allies guard the portal. It is possible for the PCs to face two encounters at this point, so prepare for also running area 1 of the Fortress at World's End.

Tactical Encounter: Gloaming Gate (page 66).

Fortress at Worlds End

In the bitter cold of the world's northern reaches stands the Fortress at Worlds End. It is an accursed place, built by long-dead hands for unknown purposes. The fortress bears few clues as to its original intent. In all, it is ruin preserved by ice and covered rime. A shimmering curtain of color writhes in the darkened heavens above it, similar light issuing from the shrine in its inner courtyard. Some of its original inhabitants still roam in undead form across the frozen waste. A few have allied with Malachi, but others harry the wizard's servants from time to time.

The visible fortress is almost empty, and it stands atop Malachi's hidden lair. Beneath the ice and rock is a network of passages and rooms. Some are ancient, but others Malachi added to hide his work and escape the hostile undead of the area. It is here that Malachi works toward opening the Far Realm.

Environment

The Fortress at Worlds End overlooks a sea full of icebergs and ice sheets that collide and grind atop the unruly waters. Near the citadel, the ice is broken up into smaller sections. To the north, ice and snow form a frozen plain at the top of the world.

Exterior Features

Extreme Cold: Every hour a character spends in outside the fortress—even while camping—he or she must succeed on a DC 23 Endurance check or lose a healing surge. If the PC has no healing surges left, that character instead takes damage equal to his or her level. Thos who take an extended rest while on the ice recover healing surges lost in combat, but not those lost from failed Endurance checks. The PCs gain a +2 bonus to these checks.

Illumination: During the day, bright light pervades despite the snow. At night, the lights in the sky provide dim light, though creatures are still subject to the effect of the falling snow.

Road: An expanse of icy, broken ground leads up to the fortress. Snow blankets jagged rock covered in patches of ebony ice. However, a wide avenue clear of ice leads to the fortress.

Hunter Vrocks

Level 11 encounter (3,200 XP)

4 vrocks (*MM* 58)

Malachi has a flight of vrocks patrolling and hunting for meat in the frozen lands around the fortress. They bring what they catch back to Malachi's butcher in area 16. You can throw these vrocks at the PCs as an extra encounter somewhere in the fortress, possibly just after the fight with the butcher or a surface encounter.

Fortress Features

Walls: Three walls (Athletics DC 25 to climb) encircle the inner courtyard. The outer walls are 60 feet tall.

Doors: Massive stone doors block access to the inner courtyards. The hinges are nested, so they can't be damaged easily. A sheet of ice covers the doors (Athletics DC 35 to break open), all of which are locked (Thievery DC 30 to open).

Shrine Hill: A false hill built of steps rises against a cliff behind the fortress. Atop it is a single, large building from which shimmering, multicolored light issues. See area 7 for more information.

Dungeon Features

Ceilings: The ceilings are 15 feet high, although specific chambers might have differing ceiling heights.

Doors: The doors are fashioned from hewn ice slabs fitted on ice hinges.

Entrances: The characters can enter the through areas marked with the number 3 on the map, through the concealed door in area 4, or through the trapdoor also in area 4. See the specific descriptions of those areas below.

Floors: Although many of the floors are hewn ice, gravel covers enough of the surface to allow normal movement. Unless otherwise noted, creatures can move across the floors normally.

Illumination: All rooms, passages, and other locations are dark, unless otherwise noted.

Sounds: The whole complex creaks and groans, cracks and shudders. These noises sometimes cover other sounds.

Temperature: Inside the dungeon, it is chilly but not dangerously cold.

Walls: The walls throughout the dungeon are fashioned from hewn magical ice and stone (Athletics DC 23 to climb).

Locations

The following encounter areas correspond to those shown on the map.

1. Demon Dogs

When the characters use the Gloaming Gate, they appear here, where more demons guard the approach to the fortress.

Encounter: Demon Dogs (page 68).

2. Dark Watchers

This shattered structure was once a bridge. Malachi's soldiers watch for intruders here.

Encounter: Dark Watchers (page 70).

3. Mist Vents

About 50 feet above the water are four vents leading into the dungeon. Mist flows from each entrance and up a short way before dispersing. Those close enough to see a vent despite the swirling snow can do so with a DC 16 Perception check.

If the PCs enter here, read:

A wide tunnel stretches into the darkness. The walls cut from ice, but you can see stone carvings underneath. Weird whorls and unusual patterns cover this stone.

The mist is irritating but harmless outside the dungeon. Within the entire length of each north-south corridor is a dangerous hazard.

Apathy Mist	Level 12 Lurker
Hazard	XP 700

Curling white mist promises loss of motivation and oblivion to those who linger here overlong.

Hazard: Whenever a character enters the room or starts its turn in the room, the hazard attacks.

Perception
No check is necessary to see the mist.

Dungeoneering
✦ DC 21: The character identifies the mist.

Trigger
When a target enters or starts its turn in the area.

Attack ✦ Necrotic
Opportunity Action **Melee** touch
Target: The triggering creature
Attack: +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).

Countermeasure
✦A character using a power with the fire or radiant keyword clears the mist in each square of the power's area. The area remains clear until the end of that character's next turn.

4. Icy Welcome

Great stone gates here stand slightly ajar, leading to a courtyard. Even though this area contains two entry points into the lower level, Malachi has left it to its ancient residents . . . or what remains of them.

Encounter: Icy Welcome (page 72).

5. Second Courtyard

The gate here is unlocked and slightly open.

When the PCs enter, read:

Beyond the stone gates is another long courtyard. The rough path continues to another set of steep stairs, leading to another gate. Unlike the other fortress walls, this gate and its wall have no towers.

6. Inner Courtyard

Undead lurk in this courtyard, attracted to the energy of the false orrery but repelled by its dangerous close-range emanations.

Encounter: Inner Courtyard (page 74).

7. False Orrery

A stepped hill rises from the north end of the courtyard. On the top of the raised area stands an ancient shrine. Malachi had a false orrery built inside the shrine to lure unwanted visitors to their doom.

Encounter: False Orrery (page 76).

8. Barracks

Before so many left to search for the *Tear of Ioun*, Malachi's agents used these sleeping quarters.

When the PCs enter, read:

This room contains empty beds that look like they haven't seen use in a long while.

The PCs can rest here safely, unless they do something to attract the attention of the demons in area 9.

9. Demon Pit

Malachi consorted with fiends to provide himself with guards and knowledge. A few remain here to revel in the chaos their master might unleash.

Encounter: Demon Pit (page 78).

10. Recreation Hall

Malachi's favored servants sometimes spent time here until he dispatched them to search for the *Tear of Ioun*.

When the PCs enter, read:

Cushions, blankets, and pillows litter the room's floor. Three ornate hookah pipes filled with murky water stand about the chamber.

11. Reflection Room

This is Malachi's private chamber for dreaming.

When the PCs see the area, read:

A single chair sits near the wall of this short hall. It looks like a guard post.

The chair is real, but the wall behind it is an illusion (Arcana DC 26 to detect and identify). Interacting with the wall allows a character to see the illusion for what it is.

When the PCs enter, read:

Mirrors cover each wall of this small room. The mirrors bear a thin brown film, likely left from smoke. A blue prayer mat lies on the floor in the center of the room next to a tall hookah pipe partly filled with dark water.

This room is safe: None of Malachi's soldiers dare to enter unless they know something is amiss, and Malachi is too busy to come here anytime soon.

12. Prison

Here, Malachi discards those who displease him. The demons sometimes "harvest" such prisoners.

When the characters round the corner, read:

Chains set in the ceiling suspend six human-sized cages above the floor. The cages are empty, although stains on the floor suggest an unhappy end for past residents.

13. Rest Hall

Malachi's few remaining soldiers while away the time here, awaiting their master's success. Each one of the secret doors that approaches this area can be located with DC 28 Perception check.

Encounter: Rest Hall (page 80).

14. Treasure Room

Malachi uses these chambers to store his collected wealth, a considerable hoard of treasure he has slowly liquidated to support himself and his mission. He has left guardians to ensure the treasure remains his.

Encounter: Treasure Room (page 82).

15. Guard Station

Malachi's sentries once kept watch on the vents.

When the PCs enter, read:

This small room contains a round table and four chairs. On the table are a few playing cards.

16. Butcher's Lair

Malachi's experiments with the Far Realm have born strange necromantic fruit in his creation of the monstrosity that lives and works here. The butcher takes care of Malachi's prisoners and enemies to feed Malachi's pets in area 19 with entertaining animate lumps of flesh.

Encounter: Butcher's Lair (page 83).

17. Hall of Tentacles

This chamber is an obstacle placed to prevent unauthorized access to the *pool of frozen spirits*.

Encounter: Hall of Tentacles (page 84).

18. Pool of the Frozen Spirits

Another ancient part of the complex, this room holds a magical device. The door to the room is locked, as described in the Hall of Tentacles tactical encounter.

When the PCs enter, read:

Golden glyphs shine, glowing beneath the ice covering the room's walls. At the center of the chamber, there stands a great font, about five feet in diameter. A blue radiance emanates from within. An uncommon chill hangs here, far colder than anything you have thus far experienced.

Lore

A character can use detect magic with Arcana to discern important details about the pool.

DC 20: *This font is in fact a magical pool. By its look, it harnesses the forces of elemental cold.*

DC 23: *Those who withstand the pool's chill can gain significant resistance to cold by drawing a portion of its magic into themselves.*

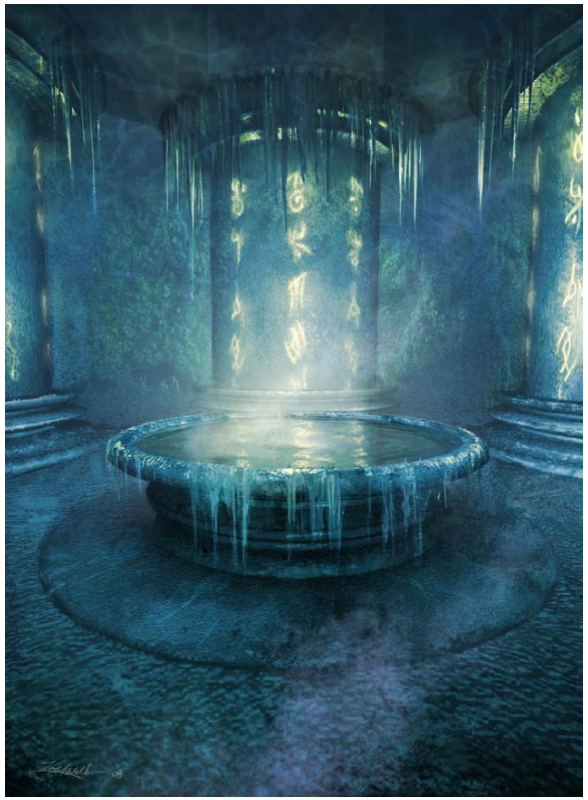
DC 25: *This pool is tainted with death energy. This could affect those who use the pool.*

Activation

The pool deals 20 cold damage to a creature each round that creature maintains contact with the water. To gain the benefit of the pool, a creature must stand unprotected within its confines for at least 3 rounds. The pool works on up to five creatures a day, and up to ten creatures a month.

Effect

The creature gains resist 5 cold and resist 5 necrotic for 30 days. If a creature dies while it has these resistances, it rises as an icewight 1 hour later.



19. Cold Shadows

Malachi keeps a few special creatures here, nurturing them to be truly mighty followers once he brings the Kaorti to the world.

Encounter: Cold Shadows (page 86).

20. Malachi's Chambers

When not working or reflecting, Malachi spends his time here, studying and relaxing.

When the characters enter this room, read:

This room holds a four-post bed, a wardrobe, chest of drawers, a large desk, a pair of chairs, and a blue rug on the floor.

Bed: Pale white worms infest the sheets, pillows, and down mattress.

Wardrobe: The wardrobe holds a collection of feminine clothing, including dresses, smallclothes, and shifts, all of which are spotted with blood and have suspicious holes.

Desk: This is a roll-top writing desk, and to either side of the chair is a column of drawers. Beneath the roll top lay stacks of papers, each page holding sketches of mad images, disturbing monsters, demons and summoning diagrams, and orrery designs, most of which are scratched through. In the raving writing, the word "Volarn" shows up repeatedly.

Valuable Drawings: If A PC succeeds on a DC 23 Perception check, he or she uncovers a valuable drawing. One minute of searching is required to uncover each one, and the characters can split up the work.

✦ One is a drawing of the butcher in area 16.

✦ Among sketches of demons and summoning diagrams is a map of area 9 (Demon Pit) that shows the secret door. Another shows the secret door in area 14. Malachi also lists the demons still dwelling there—an immolith, a solamith, and three mezzodemons.

✦ With drawings of the far eidolons is the map of area 14, also showing the secret door. The PCs also learn from the drawings that the statues in the area (far eidolons) are dangerous creatures.

✦ A diagram details the false orrery in area 7. Those who find this diagram gain +2 to checks when dealing with that trap.

✦ Another diagram details the true orrery in area 23, also granting +2 to checks when dealing with that trap. It's clear this orrery is different from the false one—it has no controls for example. It runs completely on the eldritch energy from the *Tear of Ioun*. However, some of the tactics useful against the false orrery are useful against the true orrery. Malachi has also rendered the *Tear of Ioun*—an oblong black crystal with green veins—accurately on the schematic. A note on the paper reads, "Do not allow the portal to touch the stone."

Secret Doors: A secret door (Perception DC 24 to locate from this side) opens into the library (area 22). A similar door opens back into area 19 (Perception DC 18 to locate from this side). Both doors are locked (Thievery DC 30 to open; Athletics DC 32 to break).

Treasure: The bedroom contains two parcels of treasure, likely to include rituals and *residuum*.

21. Nessus Shrine

This shrine stood here long before Malachi came to the fortress, and many of the fortress's builders are interred here. Malachi's twisted rituals have stirred malevolent spirits to wakefulness.

Encounter: Nessus Shrine (page 88).

22. Library

The door to this room is locked (Thievery DC 25 to unlock; Athletics DC 30 to break).

When the characters open the door, read:

A long narrow hall opens onto a small rectangular room. Shelves filled with books cover the walls, and racks hold scroll cases. A thick pink rug covers the floor.

This room is Malachi's library and it's here that he keeps his books related to his study.

Secret Door: A secret door (Perception DC 28 to locate from this side) opens in one of the shelves, allowing Malachi back into his chambers. It's locked (Thievery DC 30 to open; Athletics DC 32 to break).

Treasure: Two parcels of treasure are stored here, including valuable writings and consumables.

23. Bleeding Universe

This room holds the true orrery, the *Tear of Ioun,* and the mastermind behind the doom that hangs over the world. Characters pausing to listen at the door hear unspeakable sounds coming from beyond—shrieks, moans, and the crackling of energy.

Encounter: Bleeding Universe (page 90).

Conclusion

This adventure has several possible outcomes. The best is for the PCs to navigate the perils, make their way to area 23, fling the *Tear of Ioun* into the portal, and defeat Malachi and Volarn.

The PCs could defeat Malachi but end up with the *Tear of Ioun.* Its weird power is likely to corrupt the unprotected characters over time, so it's a race to find another way to destroy the artifact. How the *Tear of Ioun* affects them until they find a way is up to you.

If the PCs fail, Volarn pulls the rest of the Kaorti from the Far Realm. He then sets about spilling more of the Far Realm into the world until that plane's unnatural forces wash across the planet. Malachi might help in this, or he might escape to create another menace, or he might die at Volarn's twisted hands. Eventually, powerful mortals—possibly new PCs—intervene. Through their efforts, Volarn is defeated, but possibly not before much of the world is irreparably damaged, altered into something utterly new and awful.

It's also possible that a few Kaorti escape. If so, they set about trying to allow their trapped fellows back into the world from Far Realm. Such a plot—as well as an adventure based on PC failure—can make use of the Kaorti monsters in this adventure. They can also feature unique Kaorti that you design.

Death's Choir

Encounter Level 13 (4,650 XP)

Setup

Ghost harpy (H)
2 marrowshriek skeletons (M)
5 keening spirits (K)

Don't place the monsters until the PCs spot one or more of them.

When the PCs come near the area, read:

A palpable dread pervades the silent forest surrounding the road here, as if something were trying to pull your heart from your chest. You spot hints of buried bones among the trees.

Perception DC 18: *Floating among the trees are shadowy wisps, vaguely shaped like the upper parts of a humanoid.*

Perception DC 23: *Leering from a skeletal oak is a winged apparition—a harpy who has passed into death but not out of this world.*

Perception DC 25: *Among the bonelike branches lurk dark skeletons, with cold sparks burning dimly in their eye sockets.*

The PCs are surprised unless they spot one or more of the monsters. The battle begins with the harpy ghost's *lurking voice* (see Tactics).

When that happens, read:

Suddenly, a heart-rending song splits the silence!

The harpy's aim is to draw the PCs to her and her minions before the battle begins in earnest.

Ghost Harpy (H) **Level 14 Elite Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP 2,000

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +13 darkvision
HP 169; **Bloodied** 84
AC 28; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 thunder, insubstantial
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 8 (hover); phasing
Action Points 1

⊕ **Spirit Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+15 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 necrotic damage.

Death Kiss (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
+16 vs. Will; 2d6 + 6 psychic damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to Fortitude (save ends).

Spirit Call (standard; sustain minor; at-will) ✦ **Charm**
Close burst 10; deafened creatures are immune; +15 vs. Will; the target is pulled 4 squares and immobilized (save ends). *Sustain Minor:* Any target that has not yet saved against the effect is pulled 4 squares and immobilized (save ends).

Despairing Screech (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +15 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 6 thunder damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Lurking Voice
As long as it doesn't move or otherwise attack, the harpy ghost can use Stealth to hide while using *spirit's call.*

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Stealth +15
Str 15 (+9) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 10 (+7) **Cha** 23 (+13)

2 Marrowshriek Skeletons (M) **Level 12 Lurker**
Medium shadow animate (undead) XP 700

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +9; darkvision
HP 95; **Bloodied** 47
AC 27; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic;
Vulnerable 5 radiant
Speed 6

⊕ **Osseous Thrust** (standard; at-will)
+17 vs. AC; 1d8 + 9 damage.

Marrow Feast (standard; requires combat advantage; recharge ⚄ ⚅ ⚃)
+17 vs. AC; 2d8 + 12 damage, and the target is grabbed. Each round that the marrowshriek skeleton sustains the grab, the target takes 15 damage and is weakened until the end of the marrowshriek skeleton's next turn.

Marrowshriek (minor 1/round; at-will)
Close burst 3; targets living creatures; +15 vs. Fortitude; the target is dazed until the end of the marrowshriek skeleton's next turn. If the target is grabbed by the marrowshriek skeleton, it is stunned until the end of the marrowshriek skeleton's next turn instead of dazed.

Shadowwrought (standard; at-will)
The marrowshriek skeleton becomes invisible until it attacks.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +17
Str 18 (+10) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 16 (+9)
Con 17 (+9) **Int** 6 (+4) **Cha** 9 (+5)

5 Keening Spirits (K) **Level 14 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP 250

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
Tormenting Keening aura 1; any enemy within the aura that takes damage from a power that has the thunder or psychic keyword takes 5 extra psychic damage.
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, 10 thunder, insubstantial
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing; see also *passing shriek*

⊕ **Passing Shriek** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
The keening spirit can shift up to 1 square before or after the attack; +17 vs. Reflex; 7 thunder damage.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** –
Str 4 (+4) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 8 (+6)
Con 18 (+11) **Int** 6 (+5) **Cha** 20 (+12)

Tactics

The ghost harpy stays hidden with *lurking voice* and uses *spirit call* to draw the PCs into the grove. After its allies attack, it sustains *spirit call* and singles out a PC to attack with its claws and *death kiss*. It uses *spirit call* as a standard action again to hold the other PCs at bay while it focuses on killing its chosen victim. The ghost harpy uses an action point to accomplish the deed if it needs to do so.

As combat begins, the marrowshriek skeletons become invisible, using *shadowwrought*. They select targets, use *marrow shriek*, and then use *marrow feast* on their targets. Each skeleton sustains its grab until the victim escapes, then uses *shadowwrought* again to repeat the process. They use *marrow shriek* each turn. A bloodied skeleton ceases giving away its position.

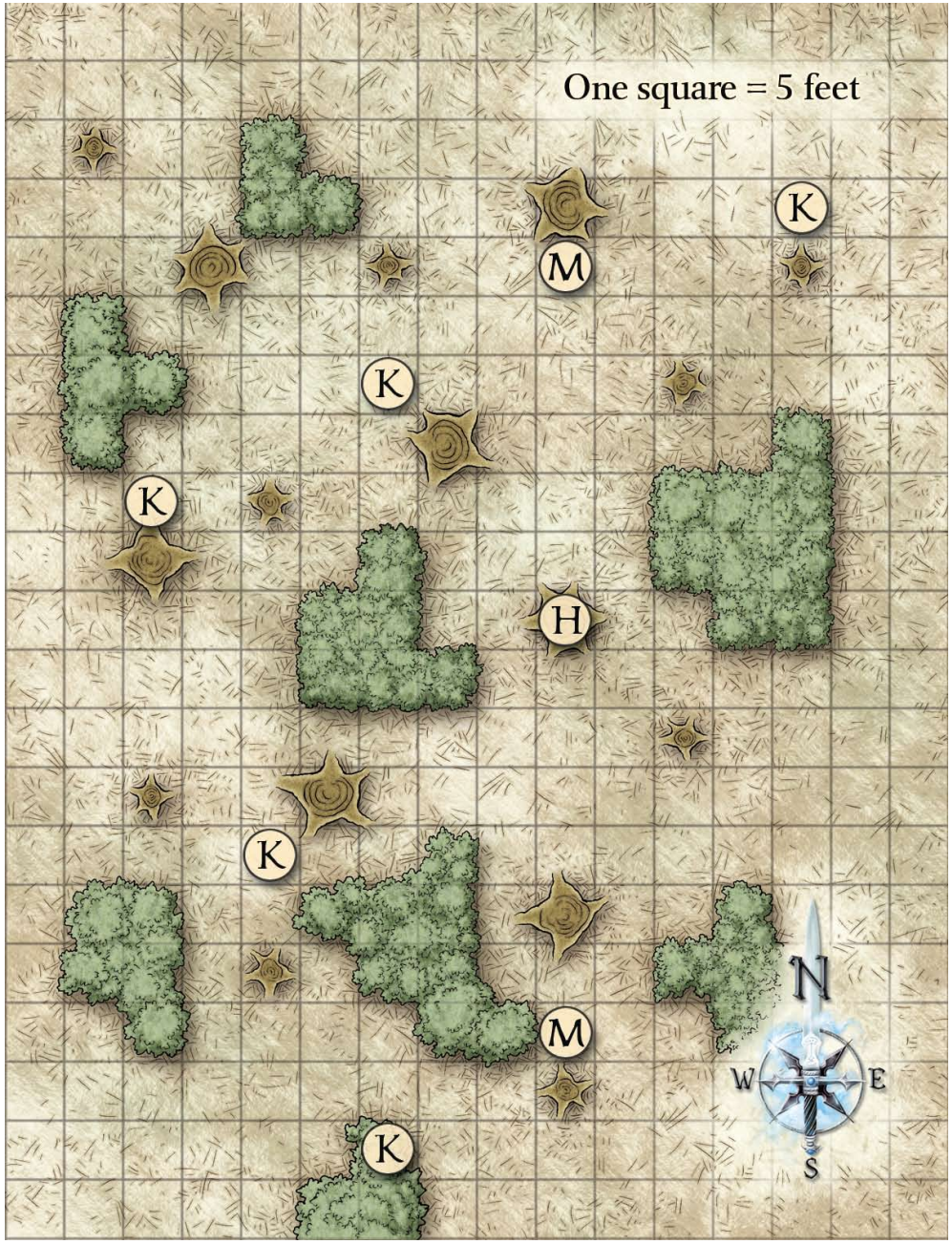
Keening spirits fly about, tormenting the PCs until destroyed.

Features of the Area

Trees: Trees (Athletics DC 10 to climb) act as blocking terrain for determining cover.

Undergrowth: These squares are difficult terrain.

Treasure: Among the tree trunks are the possessions of those who have perished here, adding up to one treasure parcel.



Back from Nightmare

Encounter Level 14 (5,800 XP)

Setup

Elomir (E)
3 boneclaws (B)
4 horde ghouls (H)

Elomir is alert for enemies. He and his troops are prepared, and only he is readily visible to those approaching the stone circle. Sneaking up on the monsters requires DC 26 Stealth checks. Don't place the other monsters until the PCs see them.

When the PCs approach, read:

A crumbling stone circle occupies the heart of this clearing. Great black standing stones, leaning and casting dark shadows in the meager light, make it up. They form pairs, capped with similar large blocks. The clearing's center is strewn with boulders and features an altar. A skeletal knight stands behind the altar, eyes and sword burning with green fire.

Perception DC 18: *Emaciated humanoid creatures that have fangs and claws lurk behind some of the standing stones.*

Perception DC 23: *Two towering figures of bone shrouded in gray flesh hang back near behind the standing stones. Each hulk has a skeletal visage and elongated clawed arms.*

PCs who fought Elomir recognize the elf's sword and armor, as well as his hair. Elomir welcomes the characters, then attacks. Although the PCs cannot be surprised, the monsters they don't see do gain combat advantage during the first round.

Elomir (E) **Level 14 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Medium aberrant humanoid, elf (undead) XP 2,000

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
Mind Undead aura 5; undead allies within the aura deal an extra 5 psychic damage with melee attacks.
HP 270; **Bloodied** 135
Regeneration 5
AC 30; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 26
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Mindripping Soulsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Psychic, Weapon**
+20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, ongoing 5 necrotic and psychic damage, and the target is marked (save ends both).

⸸ **Dual Strike** (standard; requires mindripping soulsword; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Necrotic, Psychic, Weapon**
Elomir makes two melee basic attacks.

⸸ **Disruptive Smite** (standard; requires mindripping soulsword; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Necrotic, Psychic, Weapon**
+20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 8 damage, ongoing 5 necrotic and psychic damage, and whenever the target is the target of a power that has the healing keyword, it takes 10 necrotic damage (save ends both).

⸸ **Fires of Unmaking** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic, Psychic**
Close burst 2; +17 vs. Fortitude; living creatures take 4d8 + 5 fire and necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic and psychic damage (save ends). Undead creatures in the burst deal an extra 2d6 necrotic and fire damage until the end of Elomir's next turn.

Deathly Step
Elomir ignores difficult terrain when he shifts.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common, Deep Speech, Elven
Skills Athletics +19, Intimidate +18
Str 24 (+14) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 10 (+7)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 10 (+7) **Cha** 22 (+13)
Equipment scale armor, heavy shield, longsword

3 Boneclaws (B) **Level 14 Soldier**
Large shadow animate (undead) XP 1,000 each

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 136; **Bloodied** 68; see also *necrotic pulse*
AC 30; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 25
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 8

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +20 vs. AC; 1d12 + 6 damage.

↯ **Necrotic Pulse** (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Healing, Necrotic**
Close burst 10; undead allies in the burst regain 10 hit points and enemies in the burst take 10 necrotic damage.

Relentless Opportunist
If the boneclaw hits with an opportunity attack, it can make another opportunity attack against the same target during the current turn.

Threatening Reach
The boneclaw can make opportunity attacks against all enemies within its reach (3 squares).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Intimidate +16, Stealth +18
Str 17 (+10) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 16 (+10) **Int** 10 (+7) **Cha** 18 (+11)

4 Horde Ghouls (G) **Level 13 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 200 each

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +8; special senses
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC 25; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 20
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic
Speed 8, climb 4

⊕ **Claws** (standard; at-will)
+16 vs. AC; 6 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +17
Str 17 (+9) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 18 (+10) **Int** 13 (+7) **Cha** 15 (+8)

Tactics

Elomir moves into battle with a curse. He moves among the PCs to use *fires of unmaking*, followed by an action point to use *dual strike*. If he can, he focuses his wrath on the specific character who dealt his death blow when he and the party last met. On that PC, he uses *disruptive smite* when he can see the target needs healing.

The bone claws stay at reach and behind the standing stones, using their long claws to batter PCs inside the stone circle. They move only to regain reach to a target. They work together to keep as many PCs as possible within both their reach to maximize opportunity attacks.

Remaining apart and circling the combat for opportunities to catch a PC off guard, the ghouls remain close enough to Elomir to receive his aura's benefit and, if possible, the benefit of *fires of unmaking*.

Features of the Area

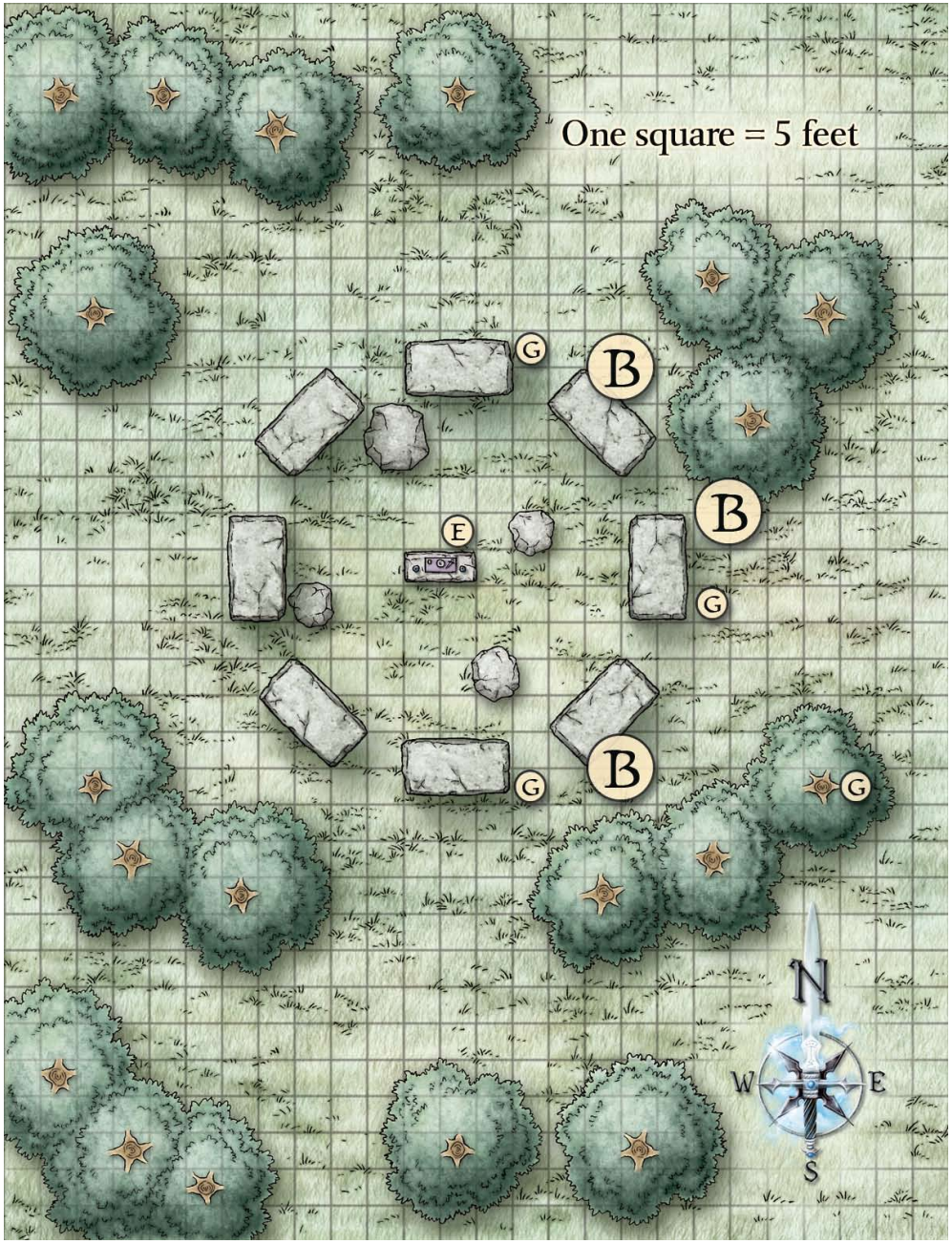
Altar: This stone bier is a low obstacle that can provide cover. A creature can clamber atop the altar from an adjacent space as a move action, or jump onto it with a DC 25 Athletics check (12 with a running start) made as part of a longer move.

Boulders: These rocks are too low to provide significant cover. They are difficult terrain.

Menhir: These standing stones (Athletics DC 15 to climb) act as blocking terrain for determining cover. They stand nine feet tall.

Trees: Trees (Athletics DC 10 to climb) act as blocking terrain for determining cover.

Treasure: Elomir and his forces have two parcels of treasure.



Gloaming Gate

Encounter Level 13 (4,800 XP)

Setup

Artantos (A)
Mezzodemon beastlord (M)
3 canoloth warbrutes (C)
3 canoloth harriers (H)

Artantos is hidden as the PCs approach, so place the shadow demon only when it appears.

When the PCs can see the portal, read:
The bleak landscape gives way to a dark sea. Overhead, gathering storm clouds flash with lightning, but no thunder comes. On the shore, an arch of metal contains billowing violet and black smoke. In front of it stands a trident-wielding, obsidian-colored insectile humanoid—two legs, four arms, multifaceted eyes, and a rigid exoskeleton. Nearby are muscular armored beasts, like hairless dogs with no eyes, vicious fangs, and lashing spiked tongues. A few of these brutes roam among the dead trees as well.

Arcana DC 23: *The portal looks like a permanent one-way passage.*

Perception DC 23: *Within the roiling smoke of the portal is a distinct horned humanoid shape made of smoke or shadow.*

Negotiating . . . with Demons

The demons don't attack right away. They allow the PCs to approach before the mezzodemon speaks.

When it does, read:
In a rasping voice, the insectile demon says, "We guard this gate, mortals. Only those who have business with our master may pass. All others die. State your business, if you dare, or go now with your miserable lives."

Artantos knows the PCs aren't servants of Malachi. It wants to trap them, so it whispers to the mezzodemon, which pretends to come up with responses itself. If the characters make a reasonable argument (DC 18 with related checks), the demon pretends to allow the PCs to pass through the portal.

Insight DC 18: *The PC notices that the mezzodemon demon hesitates before responding, as if it's listening to something before speaking. If the PCs look for another presence, they gain +2 to Perception checks to notice Artantos in the portal.*

Insight DC 23: *The PC notices the demon seems amused when it allows the characters to pass, as if it's planning mischief or betrayal. If questioned, it says, "Go! I have no more time for you, unless you want to pay me with gold or blood."*

Mezzodemon Beastlord (M) **Level 13 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium elemental humanoid (demon) XP 800
Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 132; **Bloodied** 66
AC 30; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 25
Resist 20 poison, 10 variable (2/encounter; see glossary)
Speed 6
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Trident** ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the mezzodemon slides the target 2 squares.
(standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Poison Breath** ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +17 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).
Beastly Command (minor 1/round; at-will)
One allied elemental beast within 5 squares of the mezzodemon beastlord makes a melee attack as a free action.
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Intimidate +12
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 17 (+9) **Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 16 (+9)
Equipment trident

Artantos, Shadow Demon (A) **Level 13 Elite Lurker**
Medium elemental humanoid (demon) XP 1,600
Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 196; **Bloodied** 98
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26
Resist 15 necrotic, 15 variable (2/encounter), insubstantial;
Vulnerable radiant (if Artantos takes 15 or more radiant damage, it loses phasing and insubstantial until the end of the attacker's next turn)
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 8 (hover); phasing
Action Points 1
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Claw** ✦ **Necrotic**
+16 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 necrotic damage; see also *combat advantage*.
(minor; requires combat advantage; at-will) ✦ **Void Rake** ✦ **Necrotic**
Artantos makes a melee basic attack.
(standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Abyssal Void** ✦ **Necrotic, Zone**
Close burst 3; +13 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 6 necrotic damage. The burst creates a zone of darkness that lasts until the end of Artantos's next turn. The zone of darkness cannot be illuminated, and it blocks line of sight for all creatures that cannot see in darkness. A creature that starts its turn within the zone takes 1d6 + 6 necrotic damage.
Combat Advantage
When Artantos uses a claw attack to damage a target it has combat advantage against, the target cannot spend healing surges until the end of Artantos's next turn.
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Arcana +14, Bluff +17, Stealth +18
Str 12 (+7) **Dex** 24 (+13) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 16 (+9) **Cha** 22 (+12)

3 Canoloth Warbrutes (C)	Level 11 Soldier
Medium elemental beast (demon)	XP 600 each
Initiative +11	**Senses** Perception +13; blindsight 10
HP 116; **Bloodied** 58	
AC 27; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22	
Resist 10 poison, 10 variable (1/encounter)	
Speed 7	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
+17 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.	
⸸ **Tongue Lash** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 4; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
⸸ **Tongue Seize** (minor; at-will)	
Targets a dazed, stunned, unconscious, or helpless creature; reach 4; +16 vs. Fortitude; the target is pulled into an unoccupied space adjacent to the canoloth.	
✧ **Canoloth Yowl** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**	
Close burst 2; targets creatures without the demon keyword; +15 vs. Will; 2d8 + 3 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Abyssal
Skills Athletics +15	
Str 21 (+10)	**Dex** 18 (+9) **Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 20 (+10)	**Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 9 (+4)

3 Canoloth Harriers (H)	Level 13 Minion
Medium elemental beast (demon)	XP 200 each
Initiative +8	**Senses** Perception +12; blindsight 10
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23	
Resist 10 poison	
Speed 7	
⊕ **Tongue Lash** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 4; +18 vs. AC; 5 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). If the target is already dazed, it takes an extra 2 damage instead.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Abyssal
Str 18 (+10)	**Dex** 14 (+8) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 5 (+3) **Cha** 6 (+4)

Tactics

Once two or three PCs have gone through the portal, or if the characters fail to negotiate, the demons attack. If PCs have gone through the portal, the demons try to prevent the remaining characters from making it through.

When the demons attack, the canoloths rush close enough to *tongue lash* PCs. For the first three turns, one warbrute instead uses *canoloth yowl* each turn, while the other warbrutes use *tongue seize* to tie the PCs up and set up bite attacks.

The mezzodemon beastlord fights alongside the canoloths, using beastly command each round to make them more dangerous. It unleashes poison breath whenever it can do so.

Artantos lurks on edges of the battle, looking for combat advantage. If it cannot gain combat advantage any other way, it uses *abyssal void to* cover a victim or two in sightlessness. It might also use *abyssal void* to obscure the portal.

Conclusion

If the PCs flee through the portal before killing the demons here, Artantos pursues them to area 1. The mezzodemon sends all remaining canoloth harriers to help the shadow demon.

Features of the Area

Trees: Trees (Athletics DC 10 to climb) act as blocking terrain for determining cover.

Portal: A creature must enter the portal's space with intent to pass through for it to work. A creature that does so is instantly transported to area 1 (see pages 56-57). Under the portal arch, it's gloomy enough to provide concealment.

Sinkhole: A sinkhole (Athletics DC 20 to climb) drops 40 feet to a muddy floor.

Umbral Sea: The Umbral Sea laps the shore lazily here. The water is difficult terrain.

Demon Dogs

Encounter Level 12 (3,800 XP)

Setup

Mezzodemon beastlord (M)
3 canoloth warbrutes (C)
3 canoloth harriers (H)

The PCs arrive within 1 square of the portal symbol on the tactical map. Demons stationed on the ice watch this arrival point.

When the PCs appear, read:

You lurch to another place, terrible cold suddenly blasting you. Snow spills down to the ice on which you stand. That ice floats on a calm sea that expands to the south, covered with yet more ice. A cliff bearded with ice looms to the north, rising out of the water into the white haze of the falling snow. Somewhere upon that precipice, beyond your sight, something creates eerie lights that flicker on the falling snowflakes.

You are clearly somewhere in the frozen north of the world, where Malachi's fortress is said to stand.

Arcana DC 23: *The eerie light is from a source of great magical energy.*

Perception DC 18: *A broken structure like a ruined bridge stabs out from the cliff's top.*

Perception DC 23: *Lower on the cliff are a few dark openings from which white mist issues.*

Once the characters find their bearings, read:

Snarling and yowling attracts your attention. A demon like the one that guarded the gloaming gate guides demon dogs toward you, across the ice from the west.

No negotiation is possible here. The mezzodemon and canoloths attack to kill the PCs.

Mezzodemon Beastlord (M) **Level 13 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium elemental humanoid (demon) XP 800

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 132; **Bloodied** 66
AC 30; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 25
Resist 20 poison, 10 variable (2/encounter; see glossary)
Speed 6

⊕ **Trident** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the mezzodemon slides the target 2 squares.

↷ **Poison Breath** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +17 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Beastly Command (minor 1/round; at-will)
One allied elemental beast within 5 squares of the mezzodemon beastlord makes a melee attack as a free action.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Intimidate +12
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 17 (+9) **Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 16 (+9)
Equipment trident

Tactics

The demons hurtle at the PCs, attacking without hesitation until one side is destroyed. They fight much like the mezzodemon beastlord and canoloths in the previous encounter.

3 Canoloth Warbrutes (C) **Level 11 Soldier**
Medium elemental beast (demon) XP 600 each

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +13; blindsight 10
HP 116; **Bloodied** 58
AC 27; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Resist 10 poison, 10 variable (1/encounter)
Speed 7

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+17 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.

Tongue Lash (standard; at-will)
Reach 4; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Tongue Seize (minor; at-will)
Targets a dazed, stunned, unconscious, or helpless creature; reach 4; +16 vs. Fortitude; the target is pulled into an unoccupied space adjacent to the canoloth.

↷ **Canoloth Yowl** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Close burst 2; targets creatures without the demon keyword; +15 vs. Will; 2d8 + 3 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
Skills Athletics +15
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 18 (+9) **Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 9 (+4)

3 Canoloth Harriers (H) **Level 13 Minion**
Medium elemental beast (demon) XP 200 each

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +12; blindsight 10
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23
Resist 10 poison
Speed 7

⊕ **Tongue Lash** (standard; at-will)
Reach 4; +18 vs. AC; 5 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). If the target is already dazed, it takes an extra 2 damage instead.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
Str 18 (+10) **Dex** 14 (+8) **Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 18 (+10) **Int** 5 (+3) **Cha** 6 (+4)

Development

If Artantos and canoloth harriers from the Gloaming Gate join this fight, it becomes a level 14 or 15 encounter with the PCs surrounded. However, Artantos flees the battle to area 2 if reduced to 50 or fewer hit points. If allowed enough rest, it uses its two healing surges to regain 98 hit points and joins the battle against PCs ascending the cliff.

Features of the Area

Ice: The battlefield is 3-foot-thick ice covered in snow. Those who run or charge risk falling prone on a failed DC 11 Acrobatics check. Any attack that causes forced movement increases that movement by 1 square, and the victim might fall prone as if it ran or charged. Accumulated snow reveals the location of invisible creatures. Such creatures benefit only from concealment instead of total concealment.

Thin Ice: Squares containing or adjacent to cracks or water shown on the battle map are thin ice. A creature that ends a turn or any movement in such a square is subject to an attack.

Nature DC 11: *A PC recognizes the danger of the thin ice while initially observing the battlefield.*

Perception DC 15: *A character about to enter a square of thin ice can choose to avoid that square by altering his or her movement.*

Thin Ice

Attack: +14 vs. Reflex; the target falls into the water (see below).

Effect: The target leaves a hole of its size and more cracked ice in squares adjacent to the hole.

Miss: The target immediately slides 2 squares into the nearest safe square (one with no cracked ice), determined by the DM.

Snow Squalls: The heavy snow reduces visibility. It and the wind combine to impose a –4 penalty to Perception checks and to double range penalties.

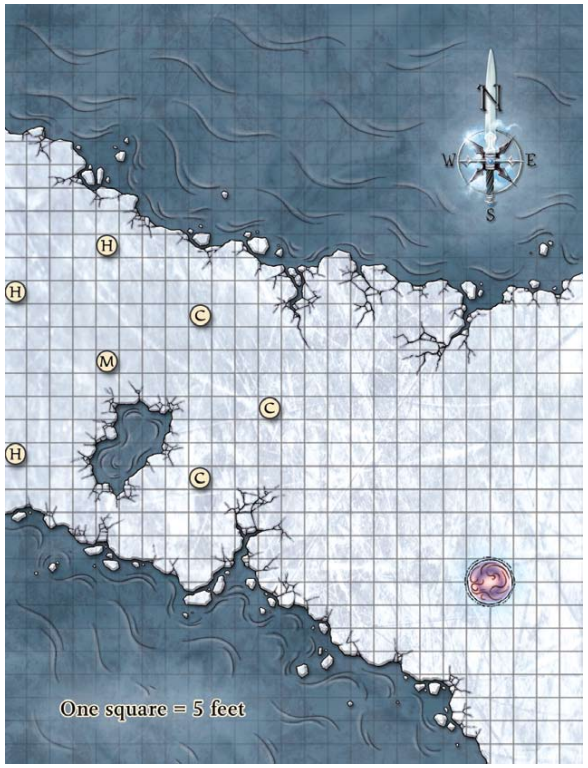
Water: Any creature that enters the water must immediately succeed on a DC 18 Endurance check or lose one healing surge from the cold. If the creature has no healing surges left, it instead takes damage equal to its level. Each round of immersion forces another Endurance check at +2 to the DC.

Conclusion

The battle here alerts the watchers in area 2. They do not join this battle, instead waiting to attack any PCs who ascend the cliff. One of the arrows of Malachi moves to get a better look. He continues to watch after the battle, which one or more PCs might notice (Perception DC 28).

If a PCs spots the watcher, read:

A humanoid, dressed in heavy furs, peers over the edge of the bridgelike structure at the battle.



Dark Watchers

Encounter Level 13 (4,200 XP)

Setup

3 arrows of Malachi (A)
Chasme (C)

Besides the one watcher who peers at the PCs in the Demon Dogs encounter, the monsters are out of line of sight before the encounter begins. They attack anyone ascending the cliff, moving up stealthily before shooting. One or more PCs might notice their maneuvering for position (Perception DC 28).

In this encounter, the danger of trying to ascend the cliff during the fight counts as an additional level 13 monster. Reduce the XP if that aspect of the challenge doesn't materialize.

If a PCs spots the archers, read:

Three thin humanoids dressed in heavy furs nock arrows to fire at you from the broken bridge.

When the chasme attacks, read:

A black creature that looks like a humanoid fly buzzes into the air on insectile wings and launches your way. It has six clawed limbs, red eyes, and a sharp, beaklike horn over its fanged maw.

3 Arrows of Malachi (A) **Level 13 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 800 each

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 90; **Bloodied** 45; see also *aberrant hiss*
AC 27; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 25
Speed 6

Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.

Longbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 20/40; +20 vs. AC; 1d10 + 8 damage.

Staggering Shot (standard; requires longbow; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 20; +20 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target slides 2 squares.

Aberrant Hiss (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +17 vs. Will; 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Intimidate +15
Str 16 (+9) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 9 (+5)
Con 15 (+8) **Int** 11 (+6) **Cha** 19 (+10)
Equipment hide armor, longsword, longbow, quiver of 30 arrows

Tactics

From their perch, the arrows of Malachi rain projectiles on the PCs, maneuvering to avoid melee. Each uses *staggering shot* on a target that will slide into more danger—and hoping the saving throw to prevent the fall off the cliff or into the water fails. Each archer uses *aberrant hiss* to push melee attackers back, so he can move and continue to make ranged attacks the next turn.

The chasme flies to the PCs and uses *drone*, favoring climbing PCs. It then uses mobile melee attack to harass the characters, again favoring climbing PCs for the combat advantage. If no PCs are climbing, the demon targets those who are dazed. It climbs if it can't fly for some reason.

Chasme (C) **Level 14 Skirmisher**
Large elemental magical beast (demon) XP 1,000

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +7
HP 138; **Bloodied** 69
AC 29; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 24
Resist 10 variable (2/encounter)
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb), fly 10

Gore (standard; at-will)
+19 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends), or ongoing 10 damage if the target already has ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Mobile Melee Attack (standard; at-will)
A chasme can move up to half its speed and make one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The chasme doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of its attack.

Drone (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Sleep**
Close burst 2; targets creatures without the demon keyword; +17 vs. Will; the target is dazed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is unconscious (save ends).

Chasme Mobility
The chasme gains a +2 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks provoked by movement.

Combat Advantage
The chasme deals an extra 1d6 damage against any target it has combat advantage against. This damage increases to 2d6 against unconscious foes.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
Skills Bluff +14, Insight +12, Intimidate +14, Stealth +19
Str 19 (+11) **Dex** 24 (+14) **Wis** 10 (+7)
Con 18 (+11 **Int** 11 (+7) **Cha** 14 (+9)

Development

If Artantos joins this battle, the shadow demon once again fights until reduced to 50 or fewer hit points. It then attempts to flee. When it does, it escapes to a mist vent (areas 3) far from the PCs. If it survives, it joins Malachi in area 23, where it fights to protect its master. Malachi can't be bothered to stop his project to deal with the PCs.

Escaping the Watchers

If the PCs enter a mist vent (area 3) in the cliff, one of the watchers goes to warn other soldiers in the fortress. Artantos, if present, stalks them, attacking when the characters encounter other monsters.

Rescuing the PCs

This encounter can be very deadly. If the PCs are having trouble, and the players are becoming frustrated, the dark watchers suffer a setback: two icewights (page 93) attack them at a dramatic moment. These undead are as dangerous to the PCs as the watchers if the characters manage to scale to the top of the cliff and confront their enemies. The arrows of Malachi honor a joint battle, implied or explicit, against the wights until the undead fall. They then attack the PCs anew. The chasme focuses its attacks on the characters at all times, however.

If icewights attack, read:

Creatures like frozen corpses topped with icy, tiefling-horned skulls rush out of the snowy haze. Each one's skull burns with blue-black fire, and each creature's fingers end in long black claws.

Features of the Area

Blood Ice: The "bloody" areas on the tactical map contain this supernatural substance (Perception DC 18 to notice it in the snow; Arcana DC 15 to detect its supernatural nature), which looks like red-hued ice. It is difficult terrain. A creature that enters or starts a turn in a space containing blood ice is subject to an attack.

Blood Ice

Attack: +16 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends both).

Effect: An undead creature gains 5 temporary hit points when hit by blood ice.

Miss: 5 necrotic damage.

Bridge: Cracked squares at the southern edge of the bridge are difficult terrain.

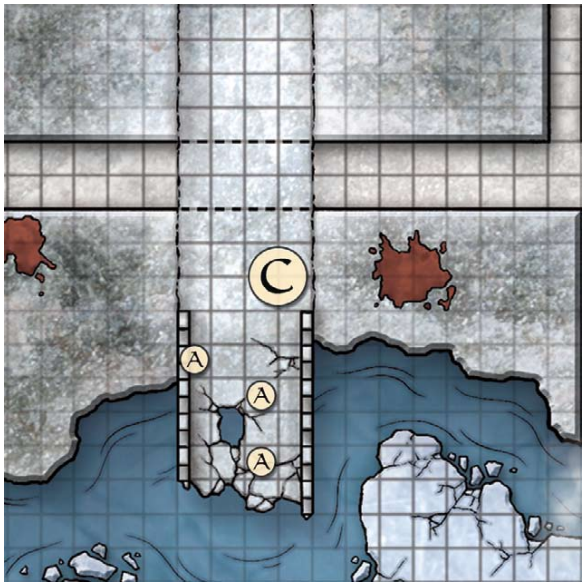
Cliff: This precipice is 80 feet high (Athletics DC 20 to climb). PCs on the cliff have cover against ranged attacks from the arrows of Malachi.

Road: Squares on the road are clear of difficult or dangerous terrain. The road still has snow on it.

Rough Terrain: Ground outside the road is icy and broken. Each space is difficult terrain.

Snow: Accumulated snow reveals the location of invisible creatures. Such creatures benefit only from concealment instead of total concealment.

Snow Squalls: The weather imposes a –4 penalty to Perception checks and doubles range penalties.



Water: Any creature that enters the water must immediately succeed on a DC 18 Endurance check or lose one healing surge from the cold. If the creature has no healing surges left, it instead takes damage equal to its level. Each round of immersion forces another Endurance check at +2 to the DC.

Conclusion

If the PCs come to the upper level of the cliff and can see the fortress, be sure to improvise a description from the information on page 56 and the map.

Icy Welcome

Encounter Level 13 (4,000 XP)

Setup

Icetomb wight (I)
2 icewights (W)

The wights lurk in the snow, the icetomb wight appearing as just a lump of ice. Don't place them until the PCs see them.

When the PCs enter the area, read:

This is a wide, empty courtyard between two walls of the fortress. Towers flank two gateways—one to the north and the other to the south—and steep stairs climb to the one in the north, which is slightly open. Large towers stand on this courtyard's corners. Similar smaller towers mark the corners of the inner wall to the north. None of the towers have doors on the ground level. On the inside of the southernmost wall are walkways on the battlements, extremely steep stairs leading up to them at certain points. Snow covers everything, except for stray stones, a rough pathway, and a large lump of dark ice just east of the gate.

Perception DC 11: *Doors lead from the battlements to the towers.*

Perception DC 18: *Within the lump of ice is a horned humanoid corpse. Its eyes flicker with malevolent light. With a creak like that of a glacier, the ice-bound form begins to move.*

Perception DC 23: *Two of the "stones" are actually nearly buried skulls attached to snow-covered corpses. As you spot them, though, the skulls alight with blue-black fire and the corpses stir. Snow falls away from the forms, revealing horns topping the skulls.*

Any monster that remains unnoticed surprises the PCs as the battle begins.

Icetomb Wight (I) **Level 13 Soldier**
Large natural humanoid (undead) XP 800

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74
AC 32; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 27
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 cold (if the wight takes cold damage, it gains regeneration 5 until it takes fire or radiant damage, or until the end of the encounter), 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 5 fire, 5 radiant
Speed 6; ice walk

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is marked (save ends).

⸸ **Freezing Grab** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Reach 2; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is grabbed. If the icetomb wight uses this power on a target it has already grabbed, that target loses a healing surge.

⸸ **Encase in Ice** (standard; requires a grabbed target; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Targets the creature the icetomb wight is grabbing; +18 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is no longer grabbed but is restrained and takes ongoing 10 cold damage (save ends both), and it is knocked prone.
Aftereffect: The target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 cold damage (save ends both).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+10) **Wis** 20 (+11)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 12 (+7)

Tactics

Using icy slip to circle and gain better tactical positions, the icewights throw themselves at the PCs. They prefer targets taking ongoing cold or necrotic damage, and each uses its action point to deal more damage to a bloodied foe.

2 Icewights (W) **Level 13 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (cold, undead) XP 1,600 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 254; **Bloodied** 127
AC 29 (31 while shifting); **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 cold (if the wight takes cold damage, it gains regeneration 5 until it takes fire or radiant damage, or until the end of the encounter), 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 5 fire, 5 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8; ice walk
Action Point 1

⊕ **Blightfire Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
+18 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 cold damage, and ongoing 5 cold and necrotic damage. If this attack hits a creature taking ongoing cold or necrotic damage, the icewight also drains a healing surge. The icewight can drain only one healing surge per turn in this way.

⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
The icewight makes two blightfire claw attacks.

Icy Slip (minor or move; at-will)
The icewight can shift 1 square as a minor action or 4 squares as a move action. It gains +2 to AC while shifting.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +17
Str 20 (+11) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 15 (+11) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 19 (+10)

The icetomb wight uses *freezing grab* first. It then drains that foe of a healing surge by using *freezing grab* again. The icetomb wight employs *encase in ice* against a foe that escapes from grabs easily or who uses forced movement to escape.

The wights don't know about the entry points to Malachi's dungeon. They also don't know about the trap (see below).

Hungry and relentless, these undead pursue fleeing PCs and fight until destroyed.

Psychic Scream Ward	Level 16 Elite Lurker
Trap	XP 2,800

The trapdoor suddenly glows with power, and a scream fill your mind, sending you reeling with pain.

Trap: When a creature touches the trapdoor, it starts to exude a disrupting telepathic cry.

Arcana (Detect Magic)

✦ DC 28: The character senses the strong magic on the door.

✦ DC 33: The character recognizes the nature of the door's magic, discerning the trap.

Trigger

When a character touches or attacks the trapdoor without disarming the trap, or enters the door's space while the door is uncovered.

Attack ✦ Psychic

Immediate Reaction **Close** burst 5

Targets: All creatures in burst

Attack: +20 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Countermeasures

✦Arcana or Thievery DC 30: An adjacent character can disable the trap with three checks.

✦A character can attack the trapdoor (Defenses 20; 200 hp). Destroying the trapdoor disables the trap.

Features of the Area

Battlements: These walkways are 55 feet above the ground. The stairs that lead to them are more like icy ladders (Athletics DC 7 to climb).

Gates: These massive stone doors are ajar and unlocked. It takes a DC 20 Athletics check to move one at up to half the mover's speed.

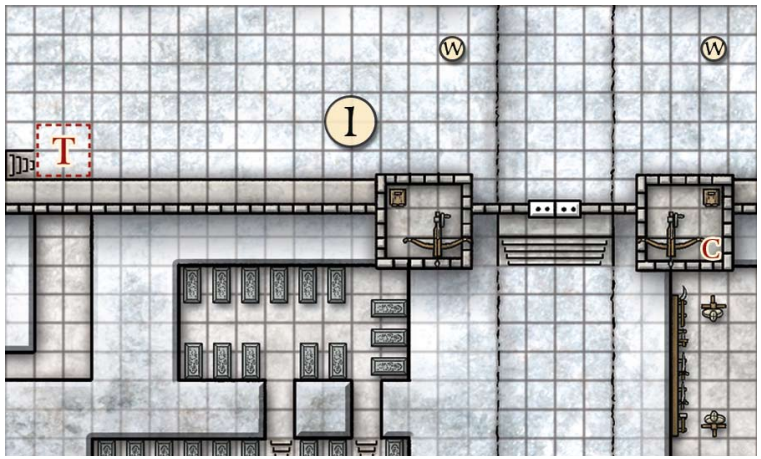
Snow: Accumulated snow reveals the location of invisible creatures. Such creatures benefit only from concealment instead of total concealment.

Snow Squalls: The weather imposes a –4 penalty to Perception checks and doubles range penalties.

Steep Stairs: The stairs leading up to the stone doors are difficult terrain.

Towers: One can enter these 70-foot towers through doors facing the fortress's interior where the battlements meet the towers. Inside, the towers are hollow, each with a staircase winding along the walls' interior for 30 feet until it opens onto the roof.

Concealed Door (C): As marked on the map, set in the lowest floor of the eastern tower is a concealed trapdoor (Perception DC 28 to locate). The door leads to area 13.



Trapdoor (T): This hidden door leads into the dungeon, but the PCs have to come within 2 squares of it to have any chance of locating it. Then, a DC 25 Perception check allows a PC to spot the depression in the snow created from the door's intermittent use and the accumulation of new snow.

The characters have to dig the door out. Once the door is uncovered, the PCs discover it is locked (Thievery DC 30 to open; Athletics DC 32 to break). Touching the uncovered trapdoor from the outside sets off a trap. The trap isn't dangerous until the snow is removed, so it's not considered part of this encounter.

The door leads to shaft of stone and ice (Athletics DC 25 to climb) that descends 20 feet into the darkness. At the bottom, the corridor leads to Malachi's secret laboratory (room 30). The door to the laboratory is barred from the other side (Athletics DC 35 to break). Malachi and his servants are alerted if the ward goes off or the PCs make too much noise in the hallway.

Inner Courtyard

Encounter Level 13 (4,850 XP)

Setup

Icewight castellan (C)
2 icetomb wights (I)
5 blightfire wretches (W)

Most of the undead lie toppled in the snow. Don't place them until the PCs see them. Characters who have already encountered icetomb wights receive a +5 bonus to Perception checks to notice the creatures in their inactive state.

When the PCs enter the area, read:

Much like the other courtyards, except for the lack of towers, this area's most prominent feature is a hill of steps leading to a squat, domed building. Eerie multicolored light flashes and swirls through openings in the dome. They play against the cliff that the fortress backs up against.

Standing at the foot of the stepped hill is a humanoid figure in black, frost-covered plate armor. It bears a sword and shield emblazoned with a many-pointed crimson star. Blue-black fire dances on its helm, and its eyes glow blue through its eye slits. Long horns curl through openings in its helmet's top. Large lumps of dark ice flank the dark knight.

Perception DC 11: *Within each lump of ice is a horned humanoid corpse.*

Perception DC 18: *Scattered in the snow are horned skeletons with tattered blackened flesh hanging from them like ragged cloth. Faint flickers of black flame dance in each one's eye sockets.*

Arcana or History DC 23: *The symbol is that of the Wrights of Nessus, an order of diabolists from the days of Bael Turath.*

As the battle begins, read:

The knight raises its ragged voice, saying, "Rise to the defense of this fortress, you devil-spawned maggots!"

All the creatures stand on their turns. Creatures unnoticed at the battle's start gain combat advantage on their first turn.

Icewight Castellan (C) **Level 14 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 2,000
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
HP 284; **Bloodied** 142
AC 30; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 27
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 cold (if the wight takes cold damage, it gains regeneration 5 until it takes fire or radiant damage, or until the end of the encounter), 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 5 fire, 5 radiant
Speed 6; ice walk

⊕ **Blightfire Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic, Weapon**
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized and takes ongoing 10 cold and necrotic damage (save ends both). If this attack hits a creature taking ongoing cold or necrotic damage, the icewight warrior also drains a healing surge.

↷ **Soul Harvest** (standard; requires an immobilized, retrained, or helpless target; recharge ⚅ ⚅ ⚅) ✦ **Healing, Necrotic**
Ranged 5; +18 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the icewight warrior and all undead allies within 2 squares regain 10 hit points.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 23 (+13) **Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 22 (+13) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 21 (+12)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword

2 Icetomb Wights (I) **Level 13 Soldier**
Large natural humanoid (undead) XP 800 each
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74
AC 29; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 26
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 cold (if the wight takes cold damage, it gains regeneration 5 until it takes fire or radiant damage, or until the end of the encounter), 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 5 fire, 5 radiant
Speed 6; ice walk

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is marked (save ends).

Freezing Grab (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Reach 2; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is grabbed. If the icetomb wight uses this power on a target it has already grabbed, that target loses a healing surge.

Encase in Ice (standard; requires a grabbed target; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Targets the creature the icetomb wight is grabbing; +18 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is no longer grabbed but is knocked prone, and it is restrained and takes ongoing 10 cold damage (save ends both). *Aftereffect:* The target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 cold damage (save ends both).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+10) **Wis** 20 (+11)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 12 (+7)

Tactics

With the simple aim to employ soul harvest as much as possible, the icewight castellan fights in the fore. It targets those who are immobilized or taking ongoing cold or necrotic damage, even risking opportunity attacks to do so.

The other wights, including the blightfire wretches, fight as described in earlier parts of this adventure. Driven by hate and duty, the creatures here chase fleeing PCs and fight until destroyed.

5 Blightfire Wretches (W) Level 14 Minion Brute
Medium natural animate (undead) XP 250 each

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *rise again.*
AC 26; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 25
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic
Speed 7; ice walk

Ⓘ Blightfire Claw (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
+17 vs. AC; 7 cold damage, and ongoing 3 cold and necrotic damage.

Rise Again
If a blightfire skeleton wretch is reduced to 0 hit points by an attack that does not deal fire damage or radiant damage, the creature falls prone and appears to be destroyed. At the start of its next turn it regains 1 hit point. However, if it is destroyed 3 times, it is destroyed for good.

Alignment Evil **Languages** –
Str 18 (+11) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 8 (+6)
Con 23 (+13) **Int** 4 (+4) **Cha** 18 (+11)

Features of the Area

Battlements: These walkways are 55 feet above the ground. The stairs that lead to them are more like icy ladders (Athletics DC 7 to climb).

Blood Ice: The "bloody" areas on the tactical map contain this supernatural substance (Perception DC 18 to notice it in the snow; Arcana DC 15 to detect its supernatural nature), which looks like red-hued ice. It is difficult terrain. A creature that enters or starts a turn in a space containing blood ice is subject to an attack.

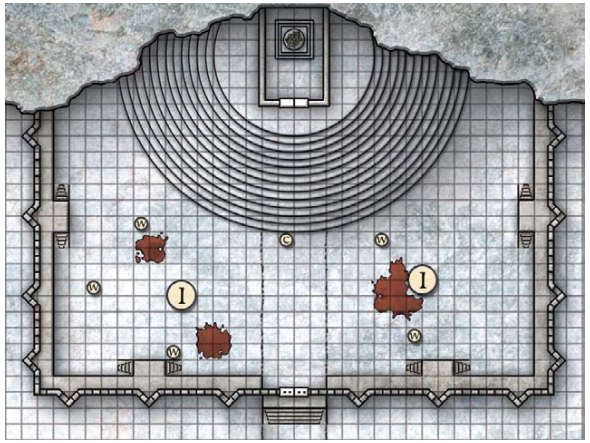
Blood Ice
Attack: +16 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends both).
Effect: An undead creature gains 5 temporary hit points when hit by blood ice.
Miss: 5 necrotic damage.

Doors to False Orrery (Area 7): These stone doors are locked (Thievery DC 23 to open; Athletics DC 25 to break). They are meant to be opened, however, because nobody who belongs in Malachi's fortress would do so. If they are opened during the battle, the false orrery might come into play against all in the area. See the next encounter.

Gates: These massive stone doors are ajar and unlocked. It takes a DC 20 Athletics check to move one at up to half the mover's speed.

Shrine Hill: A false hill built of steep, icy steps rises against a cliff behind the fortress. The steps are difficult terrain. A creature knocked prone on these steps slides down 4 squares, taking 1d10 damage in the process. A DC 18 Athletics or Acrobatics check prevents this slide and damage. Restrained creatures cannot make such a check.

Shrine: The shrine walls are rough (Athletics DC 20 to climb), and it's a 30-foot climb to the dome. Openings there are big enough for PCs to squeeze through, but the climb to the floor requires rope or a remarkable scramble to the inner wall (Athletics DC 35 to cling to the ceiling for 5 feet, or Athletics DC 25 to cling long enough to jump successfully to the inner wall). Those who can see the orrery can trigger the trap.



Snow: Accumulated snow reveals the location of invisible creatures. Such creatures benefit only from concealment instead of total concealment.

Snow Squalls: The weather imposes a –4 penalty to Perception checks and doubles range penalties.

Steep Stairs: The stairs leading up to the stone gates are difficult terrain.

False Orrery

Encounter Level 14 (5,000 XP)

Setup

False orrery (shown on map)

Malachi built this orrery as a lure for potential enemies. It's a potent trap, and to complete the ruse, Malachi made it somewhat hard to gain access to the device.

When the PCs open the door, read:

Spinning atop a great platform on the far side of this building is a large orrery. Upon metallic arms, orbs rotate around a central sphere. That central sphere contains a tear-shaped stone from which disturbing multicolored light pulses. A panel of levers on the front of the device must be a control panel. As you take all this in, the machine starts to vibrate and your skin starts to crawl.

False Orrery **Level 14 Solo Blaster**
Trap XP 5,000

A central stone with a teardrop shape sits in the middle of the spinning arms of this orrery.

Trap: Arcs of psychic energy lance out from the orrery each round. The device's whirling arms knock those who come too close away from the eldritch machine.

Perception

No check is necessary to see the orrery or the control panel mounted on its base.

Trigger

The trap is activated when a creature comes within 5 squares of the orrery while the device has line of sight to that creature.

Initiative +13

Special: The unnatural laws governing the orrery mean that its forced movement pushes targets into harm whenever possible. If the orrery's forced movement moves a target into a solid object, the forced movement stops and the target takes 1d6 damage.

Attack ✦ Psychic

Standard Action **Close** burst 10

Special: This burst has line of effect even if that line passes through solid objects.

Targets: All creatures in burst

Attack: +17 vs. Will

Hit: 1d10 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is pulled 3 squares and dazed (save ends).

Attack ✦ Psychic

Immediate Interrupt **Ranged** 10

Trigger: When a dazed creature tries to move away from the orrery.

Target: The triggering creature

Special: This attack doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Attack: +18 vs. Will

Hit: 1d10 + 5 psychic damage, and the target makes an at-will attack or a charge attack against the nearest ally, whichever would potentially deal more damage.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee** 1

Trigger: When a creature moves within range

Target: The triggering creature

Attack: +20 vs. AC

Hit: 3d10 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and knocked prone.

Countermeasures

✦A character can attack the false orrery (Defenses 25; 600 hp). Destroying the orrery disables the trap, but the orrery explodes when this happens:

Attack ✦ Psychic

Standard Action **Close** burst 10

Targets: All creatures in burst

Attack: +18 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d10 damage plus 2d10 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

✦The PCs can engage in a skill challenge to deactivate the orrery (see below).

Deactivating the False Orrery **Level 14**
Skill Challenge XP 5,000

The PCs work to deactivate the orrery.

Complexity

5 (12 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills

Arcana, Athletics, **Thievery**

Other Skills

Arcana, Dungeoneering, Perception

Victory

The orrery deactivates without further harm.

Defeat

Each success before the defeat deals the orrery 50 damage. If this reduces the orrery to 0 hp, it reacts as if attacks destroyed it (see Countermeasures). If the orrery still exists after the defeat, its immediate reaction attack becomes a minor action with no trigger, as well as an immediate reaction with the usual trigger.

Arcana

DC 18 (trained only; 1 success, no maximum)

You siphon energy from the eldritch machine, slowing it.

Arcana

DC 23 (trained only; 0 successes)

This eldritch machine doesn't contain something as corrupting as you know the *Tear of Ioun* to be. Despite appearances, the dark stone at its heart is likely not the artifact you seek.

Athletics

DC 23 (1 success, no maximum)

You use brute strength to stop the orrery's mad spinning, causing it to damage itself, or to break parts of it off—such as the dark stone in the center. You take -2 to defenses while doing this.

Dungeoneering

DC 23 (trained only; 0 successes)

As Arcana DC 24.

Perception

DC 11 (0 successes)

You watch the movements of the orrery and its lances of energy closely, granting +2 to the next Arcana or Thievery check, or +2 to one character's defenses against the trap's attacks.

Thievery

DC 23 (1 success, no maximum)

You work the controls to quickly shut down the eldritch machine.

Tactics

The fact that then orrery uses forced movement to move targets into harm also means the device moves targets into the blood snow in the inner courtyard if it can.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The false orrery fills area with bright light out to 10 squares beyond doors, if they're open.

Blood Ice: The "bloody" areas on the tactical map contain this supernatural substance (Perception DC 18 to notice it in the snow), which looks like red-hued ice. It is difficult terrain. A creature that enters or starts a turn in a space containing blood ice is subject to an attack.

Blood Ice
Attack: +16 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 5 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends both).
Effect: An undead creature gains 5 temporary hit points when hit by blood ice.
Miss: 5 necrotic damage.

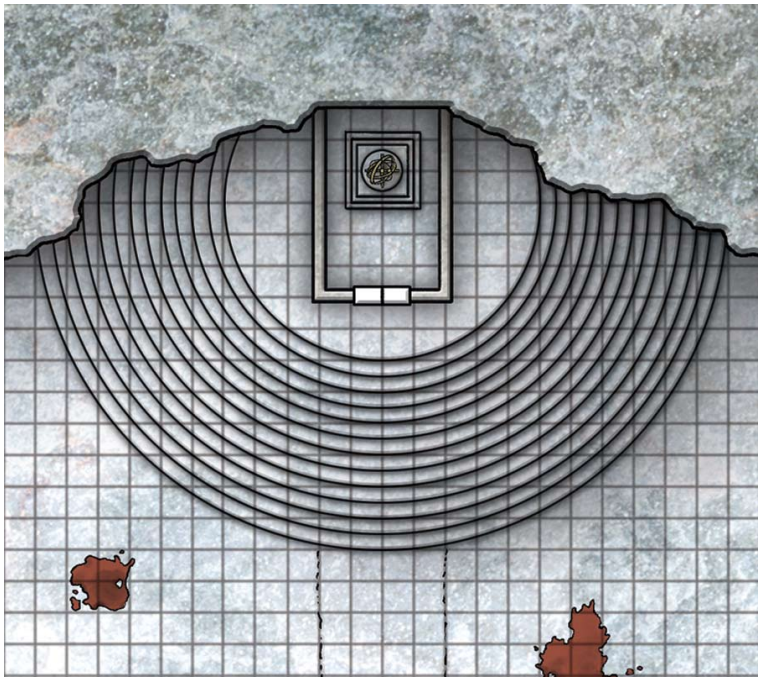
Doors: These stone doors are locked (Thievery DC 23 to open; Athletics DC 25 to break).

Shrine Steps: The steps are difficult terrain. A creature knocked prone on these steps slides down 4 squares, taking 1d10 damage in the process. A DC 18 Athletics or Acrobatics check prevents this slide and damage. Restrained creatures cannot make such a check.

Shrine: The shrine walls are rough (Athletics DC 20 to climb), and it's a 30-foot climb to the dome. Openings there are big enough for PCs to squeeze through, but the climb to the floor requires rope or a remarkable scramble to the inner wall (Athletics DC 35 to cling to the ceiling for 5 feet, or Athletics DC 25 to cling long enough to jump successfully to the inner wall). Those who can see the orrery can trigger the trap.

Snow Squalls: The weather imposes a –4 penalty to Perception checks and doubles range penalties.

Treasure: Parts of the false orrery are valuable, amounting to one monetary parcel.



Demon Pit

Encounter Level 13 (4,200 XP)

Setup

Immolith (I)
Solamith (S)
3 mezzodemons (M)

These rooms bear witness to Malachi's dealings with demons. The PCs might approach from one of two directions, and what they see depends on how they arrive. The fight might spill out into the hall or into the adjacent barracks.

If the PCs come from the southwest, read:

The heavy scent of burning wax and death fills this dimly lit chamber. In the center of the bone-littered floor near you is a large pit, its edges darkly stained. Dim red light and crunching sounds issue from its depths. A shelf runs along the east wall, holding a row of fat black candles. The room extends to the north out of sight.

The demons are out of line of sight. If the PCs wait, they might hear a mezzodemon speak or growl.

If the PCs come from the north, read:

Against the eastern wall stands a stone shrine covered in dark stains and black wax. Half-melted black candles stand amid the mess. Shelves line the north and south walls, each lined with fat black candles. The wall to the west bears a massive pentagram painted in blood. In the center of the star is a rendering of a ram's head.

Three insectile demons stand watch here, each bearing a trident. The room extends beyond them, where more candles burn. Around a corner, you spy the edge of an open pit. The demons snarl and attack.

Arcana DC 15: *The symbols here are clearly those of fiend worship or summoning. The ram's head in the pentagram is a symbol of Orcus.*

If a PC nears the secret door before the immolith emerges, read:

Heat radiates from this wall as if something fiery were stored in or behind it.

When the solamith attacks, read:

An obese demon surges from the pit, its belly a glowing red mass distended from its blue body. Tortured faces press against the skin of its abdomen as if trapped within. The demon has clawed hands, a horned head, and a fanged maw. From its belly it rips a chunk, which begins to smolder and smoke.

When the immolith attacks, read:

A tall pillar of smoke and fire with six clawed hands lunges into the room. A fanged, horned skull hovers at its top.

3 Mezzodemons (M) **Level 11 Soldier**
Medium elemental humanoid (demon) XP 600 each

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 113; **Bloodied** 56
AC 27; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Resist 20 poison, 10 variable (2/encounter)
Speed 6

⊕ **Trident** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Skewering Tines (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires trident; reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, ongoing 5 damage and the target is restrained (save ends both). While the target is restrained, the mezzodemon can't make trident attacks.

Poison Breath (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
Skills Intimidate +11
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 15 (+7) **Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 17 (+8) **Int** 10 (+5) **Cha** 13 (+6)
Equipment trident

Solamith (S) **Level 15 Artillery**
Large elemental humanoid (demon) XP 1,200

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +8
HP 115; **Bloodied** 57
Regeneration 10 (if the solamith takes cold damage, regeneration doesn't function on its next turn)
AC 26; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 25
Resist 10 fire, 10 variable (2/encounter)
Speed 8

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 2; +21 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage plus 1d6 fire damage.

Soulfire (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
The solamith chooses one of the following attacks, taking damage as it hurls parts of itself at enemies. The solamith cannot reduce itself to 0 or fewer hit points in this fashion.
✦ Area burst 1 within 20; +19 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 6 fire and necrotic damage. The solamith takes 5 damage.
✦ Area burst 2 within 20; +19 vs. Reflex; 4d6 + 6 fire and necrotic damage. The solamith takes 10 damage.
✦ Area burst 3 within 20; +19 vs. Reflex; 5d6 + 6 fire and necrotic damage. The solamith takes 15 damage.

Soulfire Retort (immediate reaction, when the solamith takes damage from a melee attack; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Close blast 3; +19 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 6 fire and necrotic damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 13 (+8)
Con 19 (+11) **Int** 4 (+4) **Cha** 8 (+6)

Immolith (I)	**Level 15 Controller**
Large elemental magical beast (demon, fire, undead)	XP 1,200
Initiative +10	**Senses** Perception +9
Flaming Aura (Fire) aura 1; any creature that enters or starts its turn in the aura takes 10 fire damage.	
HP 153; **Bloodied** 76	
AC 27; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 25	
Immune disease, fire, poison; **Resist** 15 variable (2/encounter); **Vulnerable** 10 radiant	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
Reach 4; +20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
⸸ **Fiery Grab** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
The immolith makes a claw attack (see above) against a Large or smaller target. On a hit, the target slides into a square adjacent to the immolith and is grabbed (until escape). While grabbed, the target loses any resistance it has to fire. An immolith can hold up to five grabbed creatures using this power.	
⸸ **Deathfire Curse** (minor; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Will; the target is slowed (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The target takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
Vigor of the Grave (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Healing**	
Close burst 5; undead in the burst (including the immolith) regain 5 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Abyssal
Str 22 (+13)	**Dex** 16 (+10) **Wis** 15 (+9)
Con 25 (+14)	**Int** 9 (+6) **Cha** 18 (+11)

Tactics

The mezzodemons attack as soon as they see the PCs. Two rush to use their tridents, while the third moves to catch as many PCs as it can in its *poison breath*. Each round after the first, at least one mezzodemon uses *poison breath*. Unless they have a reason to want to restrict PCs movement, such as preventing a badly wounded PC from escaping or holding PCs off the solamith, they rarely use *skewering tines*.

On its turn, the solamith climbs out of the pit and begins hurling *soulfire*. At first, it uses the *soulfire* that deals the highest damage, but in later rounds it uses the next weakest option (matching its rate of regeneration). While bloodied, it uses the *soulfire* that does the least damage to it and the PCs.

It takes a minor action for the immolith to open the secret door. The demon then moves within reach of at least two PCs and uses *fiery grab*. It employs *deathfire curse* to keep the PCs within reach and to prevent their escape.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Candles provide dim light in this room. When the immolith arrives, the room is filled with bright light.

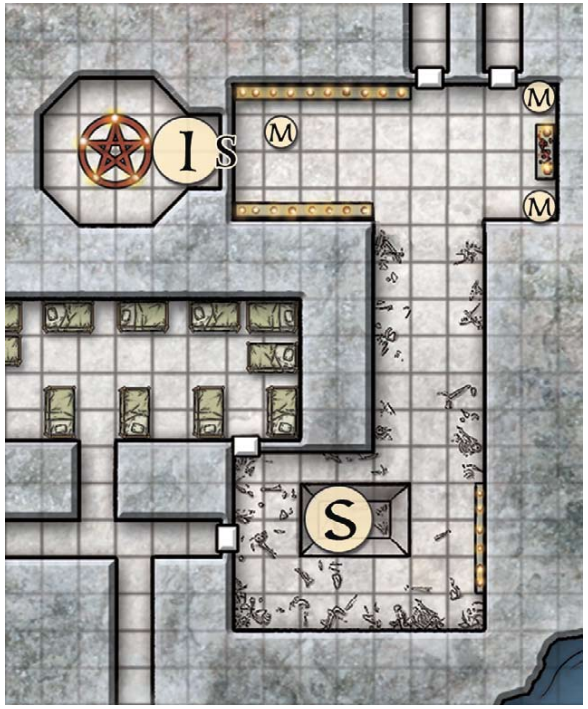
Pit: The pit (Athletics DC 21 to climb) is 40 feet deep. A fall onto jagged bones at the bottom deals an extra 1d10 damage.

Altar: This altar is a low obstacle that can be used for cover. Its squares are difficult terrain.

Secret Door: The wall's pentagram hides a secret door (Perception DC 24 to discern).

Summoning Circle: This binding diagram contains two Magic Circles drawn together in the same space. The circles would normally prevent 20th-level or lower aberrant or elemental humanoids from crossing or using powers across it, but they are currently broken (Arcana DC 15 to discern this fact).

Treasure: This room contains one parcel, most likely items useful for summoning.



Rest Hall

Encounter Level 13 (4,200 XP)

Setup

Malachi's Shade Witch (S)
3 Fists of Malachi (F)
2 Advanced Eyes of Malachi (E)

Diverting themselves with practice and sensual pleasures, Malachi's few remaining soldiers reside here with little attention to the rest of the dungeon. The PCs must still approach quietly (Stealth DC 18 if approaching from the east or the open corridor to the south; DC 13 if coming from a secret door or the concealed door from the tower in area 4).

This area has too many possible points of approach to describe succinctly here. Use the PCs' position, the tactical map, and the room and monster descriptions to help describe the area.

When the PCs enter the area, read:

Torches light this open area, which is a series of connected rooms. Blood and other substances stain the floor. The odor is a mix of smoke, alcohol, rot, and sweat.

If the PCs have succeeded in a quiet approach, they hear the soldiers talking in the eastern room and sparring in the western room.

When the PCs see the eastern room, read:

This chamber has two raised areas to the north and south, each with steps for access. Each holds cushions and bedding, spilled cups and forgotten eating utensils.

If unaware, the soldiers here are reclining among the cushions, drinking, talking, and smoking.

When the PCs see the western room, read:

This room is a training area, with battered practice dummies and a weapons rack.

The two soldiers here are sparring.

When the PCs enter the northern room, read:

A fire pit is in the west, burning with strange blue fire. Water churns in an endless loop in a wall hollow. A food preparation area is in the east, littered with dirty crockery.

3 Fists of Malachi (F) **Level 11 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 600 each

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +4
HP 111; **Bloodied** 55
AC 27; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Speed 5

⨺ **War Pick** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage (1d8 + 10 to a bloodied foe); crit 2d8 + 15 (2d8 + 20 to a bloodied foe), and ongoing 5 damage and target is marked (save ends both).

Scream for Malachi (when reduced to 0 hp) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +15 vs. Will; 2d6 + 3 psychic damage (2d6 + 8 psychic damage to a bloodied target).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Intimidate +13
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 18 (+9) **Wis** 9 (+4)
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 12 (+6) **Cha** 17 (+8)
Equipment scale armor, light shield, war pick, mask

Malachi's Shade Witch (S) Level 12 Elite Controller
Medium natural humanoid, shadar-kai XP 1,400

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision
HP 228; **Bloodied** 114
AC 26; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 25
Resist 10 necrotic
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⨺ **Shadowfire Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
+17 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 fire and necrotic damage, and the shade witch is invisible to the target until she attacks.

Shadowed Eye (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +17 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 5 psychic damage, and the target has no line of sight to anything beyond 2 squares until the end of the shade witch's next turn.

⨺ or **Shadow Fury** (standard; at-will)
Malachi's shade witch makes two basic attacks.

Soul Flaying (standard; recharges when a target within sight becomes bloodied) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +17 vs. Will; 4d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target can't use healing surges until the end of the shade witch's next turn.

Shade Voice (standard; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
Area burst 2 within 10; +16 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Shadowbite Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Malachi's shade witch teleports 6 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of her next turn. Enemies adjacent to her when she teleports take 1d10 + 5 necrotic damage and are knocked prone.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +17, Stealth +14
Str 12 (+7) **Dex** 16 (+9) **Wis** 9 (+5)
Con 18 (+10) **Int** 22 (+12) **Cha** 20 (+11)
Equipment leather armor

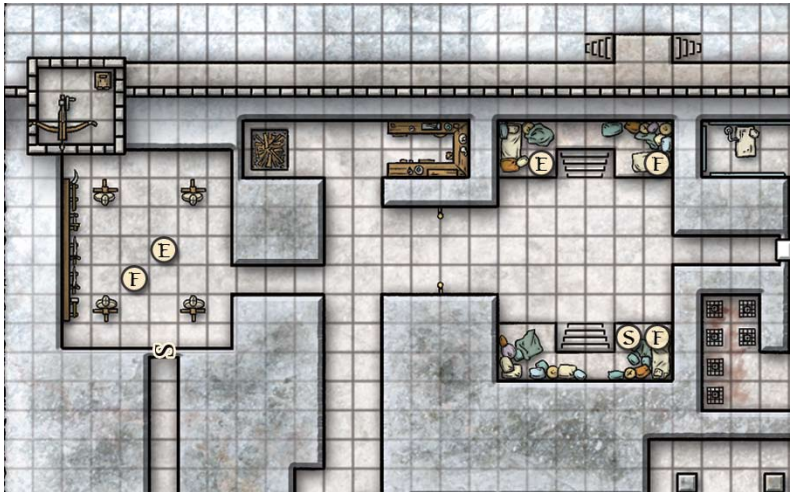
2 Advanced Eyes of Malachi (E) Level 12 Skirmisher		
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 700 each
Initiative +9	**Senses** Perception +10	
HP 95; **Bloodied** 47		
AC 23; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19		
Speed 6		
ⓘ **Battleaxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
+14 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage.		
ⓘ **Handaxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
+14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage.		
Malachi's Fangs (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**		
The eye of Malachi makes a battleaxe attack and a handaxe attack. If both attacks hit, one target takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).		
Scream for Malachi (when reduced to 0 hp) ✦ **Psychic**		
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +16 vs. Will; 2d6 + 5 psychic damage.		
Pain Slide (move; at will)		
Creatures taking ongoing damage can't attack the eye of Malachi for moving or shifting.		
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech	
Skills Nature +10, Stealth +17		
Str 20 (+11)	**Dex** 22 (+12)	**Wis** 9 (+5)
Con 16 (+9)	**Int** 11 (+6)	**Cha** 18 (+10)
Equipment hide armor, battleaxe, handaxe, mask		

Tactics

The warriors here—eyes of Malachi and fists of Malachi—confront the PCs directly. Fists of Malachi form the front line, and the eyes of Malachi skirt around the PCs to flank them. All zealously protect the shade witch.

She cares less about them, but she relies on them to allow her to use her ranged and area attacks. The witch looses the vile utterance of *shade voice* first, and then uses *soul flaying* on the most badly wounded PC. She then falls back on her basic attacks, moving around the edge of the fight and escaping a serious melee threat with *shadowbite jaunt*.

All Malachi's servants are fanatic. They fight to the death.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light from torches and fire.

Cabinets: The cabinets in the cooking area hold food, water, wine, boxes of tobacco, and cooking equipment. Enough food is stored here to feed a party of five for months.

Concealed Trapdoor: Where indicated on the map, a trapdoor in the ceiling (Perception DC 23 to locate from this side) leads to the lower reaches of the tower in area 4.

Fire Pit: The fire is magical (Arcana DC 25 to discern without experimentation). It warms the area slightly, and it cooks food, but it gives off no smoke, fails to melt ice, and won't harm creatures.

Platforms: These raised areas are 3 feet above the floor. A creature can clamber up on one as a move action or jump up. The stairs are gradual.

Practice Dummies: These flexible dummies are difficult terrain. They can provide cover.

Secret Door: Hidden on the south wall in the room with the practice dummies is a secret door (Perception DC 28 to locate).

Water Loop: This magical hollow (Arcana DC 25 to discern the magic) draws water from surrounding ice and keeps it cool and fresh.

Weapons Rack: This holds eight longswords, eight battleaxes, ten handaxes, four longbows, ten daggers, eight war picks, and 300 arrows.

Treasure Room

Encounter Level 13 (4,000 XP)

Setup

2 far eidolons (F)

The monsters aren't apparent. Don't place them until the PCs see them.

When the PCs enter, read:

This pair of rooms consists of a larger chamber with a smaller one attached to the west. In the smaller chamber's center is a weird statue of a tentacled humanoid with a featureless face. It pains you to look at it.

Perception DC 25: *The statue has a presence that makes you think it's a creature.*

The far eidolons ignore the PCs until they are attacked, or until the characters enter the treasure room.

When the PCs open the secret door, read:

Six wide, square pillars support the ceiling of this large room. Against the far wall, valuables are piled around a statue similar to the one in the outer room.

When an eidolon acts, read:

A hideous rune appears on the humanoid statue's face. The rune begins to ooze crimson fluid as the creature lunges toward you.

2 Far Eidolons (F) **Level 14 Elite Controller**
Medium aberrant animate (construct) XP 2,000 each

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
HP 276; **Bloodied** 138
AC 25; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 27
Immune disease, poison, petrification
Saving Throws +2
Speed 4
Action Points 1

Twisting Slam (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
+19 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends). While taking this ongoing damage, the target deals 5 psychic damage to any of its allies that are adjacent to it at the start of its turn.

Unnatural Retribution (immediate reaction, when an enemy attacks the eidolon while it is in *mindbending stance*; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +17 vs. Will; 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Mindbending Stance (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Until the end of the eidolon's next turn, enemies that start their turns within 5 squares of it take 5 psychic damage, and a -2 penalty to attack rolls and defenses. If the eidolon moves, the effect ends.

Statue Form
If the far eidolon remains still, it looks like a statue. In this form, it has resist 10 all and it can be recognized as a creature with a DC 30 Perception check.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 16 (+9) **Wis** 9 (+5)
Con 18 (+10) **Int** 6 (+4) **Cha** 19 (+10)

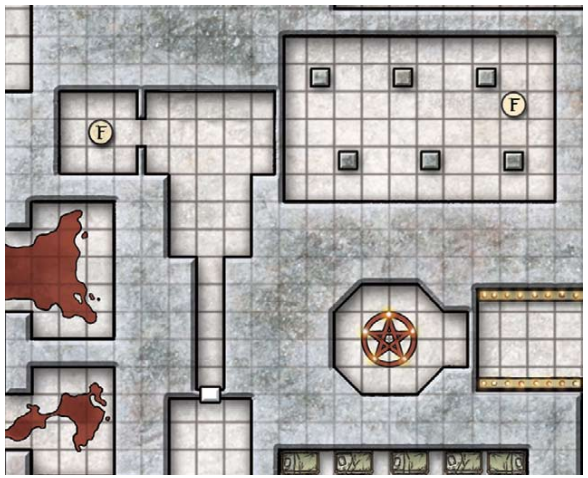
Tactics

The eidolons stay on opposite sides of the PCs to attack. Every other round, one eidolon might take up a *mindbending stance*. It is more likely to do so if it thinks it can reach one or more PCs while it is in the stance.

Features of the Area

Secret Door: This door can be located with a DC 26 Perception check. The door is locked (DC 30 Thievery to open; DC 32 Athletics to break open).

Treasure: The treasure room contains four parcels of treasure.



Butcher's Lair

Encounter Level 14 (5,000 XP)

Setup

Malachi's butcher (B)

The butcher waits here, ever alert for hunters to bring it meat to cut and digest. Sneaking up on the monster requires DC 20 Stealth checks.

When the PCs enter the area, read:

This frigid area smells coppery, and the frozen blood in and on the floors and walls makes it clear why.

When the PCs see the butcher, read:

Lumbering into view is a horribly distended zombie with exposed muscle, claws, and a lumplike head with a wide, fanged maw. It wields a massive cleaver. As it sees you, it starts to wheeze and gag, bringing chunks of meat and sharp bone into its mouth.

Meat Mote **Level 12 Minion**
Tiny natural animate (undead) XP –
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 28; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 24
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic
Speed 8

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+17 vs. AC; 5 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the meat mote's next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 24 (+13) **Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 18 (+10) **Int** 2 (+2) **Cha** 2 (+2)

Malachi's Butcher (B) **Level 14 Solo Brute**
Large natural animate (undead) XP 5,000
Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
HP 564; **Bloodied** 282; see also *rupture*
AC 26; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 26
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 10 radiant
Saving Throws +5
Speed 4
Action Points 2

⊕ **Cleaver** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 2d10 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends). On a critical hit, the ongoing damage increases to 10 and has *Aftereffect:* ongoing 5 damage (save ends). Against a grabbed target, the butcher scores a critical hit on a natural roll of 18-20.

⸸ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is grabbed. The butcher can grab only one creature at a time, and it can't make claw attacks while grabbing.

⸸ **Butchery** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The butcher makes a cleaver and a claw attack.

⸸ **Mangling Maw** (minor; requires a grabbed target; at-will)
Targets a creature the butcher is grabbing; +15 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the butcher regains 5 hit points.

Spew Meat Mote (minor; at-will)
Malachi's butcher takes 10 damage. A meat mote appears in a square of the butcher's choice within 2 squares. It acts right after the butcher. The butcher can have only four active meat motes at a time.

Rupture (when reduced to 0 hit points)
Four meat motes appear in the butcher's space. They take their turn immediately after the butcher is reduced to 0 hit points.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 24 (+13) **Dex** 18 (+10) **Wis** 18 (+10)
Con 21 (+10) **Int** 6 (+4) **Cha** 2 (+3)
Equipment cleaver

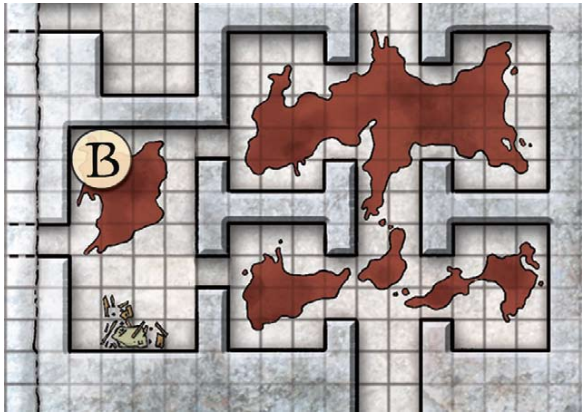
Tactics

The butcher rips into the PCs, ignoring danger to itself to reach choice targets. When it grabs and uses *mangling maw*, it drops the grabbed target to use its claws again on the next round. It spews meat motes whenever it can, and they move quickly to flank and harry the PCs.

Features of the Area

Bloody Ice: This resembles blood ice, but it's harmless (Arcana DC 12 to discern).

Debris: This shattered bed is where the butcher reclines when its not pacing or otherwise active. The area is difficult terrain.



Hall of Tentacles

Encounter Level 13 (4,400 XP)

Setup

Malachi's grasping mist trap (T)
Roper eidolon (R)
4 aberrant flingers (A)

To safeguard the *pool of frozen spirits*, Malachi installed a number of nasty traps in this area.

When the PCs enter, read:

A doorway opens in the center of each wall—a single door to the north and south, and double doors to the east and west. Every inch of the stone walls, floor, and ceiling bear odd carvings of laughing fiendish faces, their mouths dark and hollow. Curling mist covers the floor.

Perception DC 23: *Something writhes in the mist, like a tendril or serpentine creature.*

When the trap attacks, the western double doors open, awakening the creatures in the western room.

When the PCs see this, read:

The western double doors open, revealing a cross-shaped room of hewn ice, its floor covered in gravel. In the room's center is a roughly carved pillar of stone. It opens a monstrous crystalline eye and a maw full of crystal fangs. Tentacles sprout from its side.

The PCs might not have line of sight to the far door, so don't mention it until they see it. Don't place the aberrant flingers until the PCs see them.

When the aberrant flingers attack, read:

A crawling, violet knot of tentacles and eyes scuttles toward you.

Malachi's Grasping Mist (T) **Level 13 Elite Obstacle**
Trap XP 1,600

Wisps emerge from the ghostly mist, solidifying and lashing at you.

Trap: Mist fills this room, allowing the grasping mist to attack anywhere within it. The room's doors close moments after a number of intruders enter the room, then the trap rolls initiative. It also attacks when a creature approaches a door.

Perception
✦ DC 23: The character spots the grasping mist before it attacks.

Arcana
✦ DC 18: The character recognizes the room's doors are the trap's focus.
✦ DC 23: The character's knowledge provides a +2 bonus to Thievery checks to open a door.

Initiative +11

Attack ✦ Necrotic
Standard Action **Close** blast 4 (from each doorway, which fills the room)
Target: Each creature in blast
Attack: +16 vs. Will
Hit: 1d10 + 2 necrotic damage

Attack ✦ Necrotic
Opportunity Action **Melee** 1
Trigger When a creature moves adjacent to or touches a doorway while inside the room.
Target: The triggering creature
Attack: +16 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is dazed (save ends) and pushed 2 squares.
Miss: The target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Countermeasures
✦ **Acrobatics** (part of a move action; DC 26) The character can tumble through an open doorway without triggering the opportunity attack.
✦ **Arcana** (standard action; DC 26) The character clears all adjacent squares of mist. Those squares are safe from the trap's next standard action attack. Then the mist returns, unless the character clears the squares again.
✦ **Athletics** (standard action; DC 30) The character breaks a door open, taking a –2 to defenses while doing so.
✦ **Thievery** (standard action; DC 32) An adjacent character can open a door without triggering the opportunity attack.
✦ A character can ready an attack on the grasping mist as it makes its standard action attack. The grasping mist has defenses of 25. If the character hits, the character's square and those in the attack's area are safe from the trap's next standard action attack.
✦ A character can attack a door (defenses 22; 75 hp).

Roper Eidolon (R) **Level 14 Elite Controller**
Large aberrant animate (construct) XP 2,000

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 280; **Bloodied** 140
AC 28; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 26
Immune disease, poison, petrification
Saving Throws +2
Speed 4
Action Points 1

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+19 vs. AC; 2d10 + 10 damage.

⊕ **Tentacle** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 10; +17 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 4 damage, and the target is grabbed. While the target is grabbed, it is also weakened.

Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
The roper makes two tentacle attacks.

Reel (minor 2/round; at-will)
Targets a creature the roper eidolon has grabbed; +17 vs. Fortitude; on a hit, the target is pulled 5 squares.

Pillar Body
If the roper eidolon that does not move, retracts its tentacles, and keeps its eye and mouth closed resembles a rough-hewn pillar. In this form, it has resist 10 all and it can be recognized as a creature with a DC 30 Perception check.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 22 (+13)	**Dex** 17 (+10)	**Wis** 20 (+12)
Con 20 (+12)	**Int** 6 (+5)	**Cha** 10 (+7)

4 Aberrant Flingers (A)	Level 13 Minion Brute
Medium aberrant animate (construct)	XP 200 each
Initiative +10	**Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
HP 1; a minion never takes damage from a miss	
AC 25; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24	
Immune disease, poison, petrification	
Speed 8	
⊕ **Tentacle Knot** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**	
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC; 8 acid damage, and the target is grabbed. A grabbed target takes 8 acid damage at the start of each of the aberrant flinger's turns.	
⸸ **Fling** (minor 1/round; at-will)	
Targets a creature the aberrant flinger is grabbing; +15 vs. Fortitude; 5 damage, and the target slides 3 squares and is knocked prone. The target is no longer grabbed. *Miss:* The target is no longer grabbed.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 22 (+12)	**Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 8 (+5)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 2 (+2) **Cha** 16 (+9)

Tactics

The roper eidolon reaches into the trapped room—without touching a door—and grabs one or two PCs. It then uses reel to separate those PCs from the party and bring them close for biting. The roper continues this tactic, grabbing, reeling, and biting throughout the combat. It doesn't move from its spot unless staying there proves too dangerous. For instance, if flanked, it might move so its back is against a wall.

Meanwhile, the aberrant flingers stay out of the trapped room, flinging PCs that move into their room back into the trap. They also attack characters who escape from the roper, also flinging such unfortunates back into the trap.

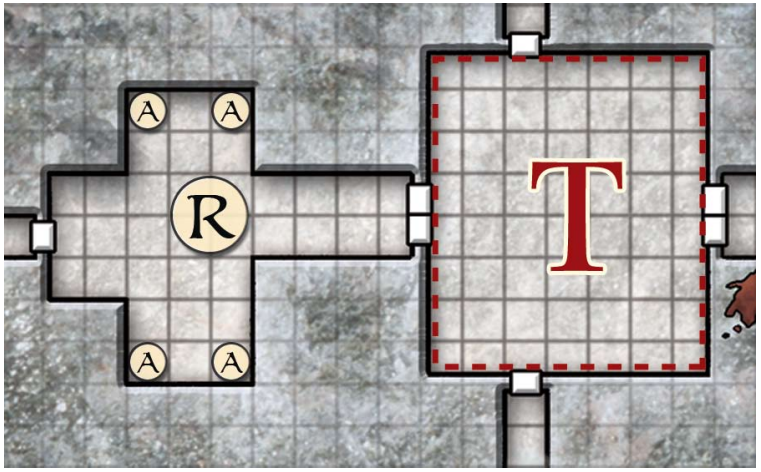
All the creatures here fight until destroyed.

Features of the Area

Far Door: This door leads to the pool of frozen spirits (area 18). It's locked (Thievery DC 23 to open; Athletics DC 23 to break).

Conclusion

If the PCs kill the monsters and close the double doors, they have a safe place to rest between the trap and the *pool of frozen spirits*. Malachi is busy, and his servants don't come near this area.



Cold Shadows

Encounter Level 13 (4,600 XP)

Setup

Beholder eye of frost (B)
Young shadow hulk (S)
2 shadow hook horrors (H)

All the monsters here lurk out of sight or in the shadow taint—see Features of the Area. The PCs might not see them immediately.

When the PCs enter the room, read:

Clouds of darkness roil in this cold chamber like dark smoke, defying your light. The floor is stained with blood, and bits of bone and flesh are scattered on it. Three corridors and a pair of double doors lead out to the north, while another corridor leads south.

Perception DC 11: *Some of the bits on the ground twitch as if alive.*

Perception DC 18: *Crouching in one of the larger areas of darkness is a 12-foot-tall insectile monster with obsidian carapace. It has massive arms, claws, and mandibles. Its weird, multieyed face draws your attention, making your head swim.*

Perception DC 23: *Clinging to the walls on arms that end in outsized hooks is a creature like a cross between a vulture and a giant cockroach. Its body is glossy black, its eyes hollow pools of darkness.*

The bits are harmless remnants of the butcher's meat motes, which the zombie releases here to feed and entertain the monsters. A DC 23 Arcana check is enough to discern the necrotic energy still in the bits and their harmlessness.

When the eye of frost attacks, read:

A floating orb with a huge central eye and numerous eyestalks floats into view. It has an armored hide the color of frosted ice, and its eyes are blue-black. Within its maw are crooked fangs. It snarls, uttering a barking phrase like an order.

If a PC speaks Deep Speech: *In Deep Speech, the creature says, "Rip them and tear them, then feast on their warm blood and bones."*

Young Shadow Hulk (S) **Level 12 Elite Soldier**
Large shadow magical beast XP 1,400

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision, tremorsense 5
HP 252; **Bloodied** 126
AC 28; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, burrow 2 (tunneling); phasing
Action Points 1

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage.

Grabbing Double Attack (standard; at-will)
The young shadow hulk makes two claw attacks. If both claw attacks hit the same target, the target can be grabbed. A grabbed target takes ongoing 10 damage from the young shadow hulk's mandibles until it escapes. While grabbing a target, the only melee attack the young shadow hulk can make is a single claw attack against the grabbed target.

Dazing Gaze (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Gaze, Psychic**
Close blast 5; targets enemies; +15 vs. Will; the target is dazed (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 26 (+14) **Dex** 16 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 22 (+13) **Int** 5 (+3) **Cha** 12 (+7)

Tactics

The young shadow hulk and hook horrors engage the PCs in melee, trying to grab their targets for biting on subsequent turns. Each turn, the young shadow hulk uses dazing gaze on the PCs. The shadow hook horrors employ shadow cloak to outmaneuver their foes.

2 Shadow Hook Horrors (H) **Level 13 Soldier**
Large shadow beast XP 800 each

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +9; blindsight 10
HP 137; **Bloodied** 68
AC 28; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 24
Speed 4, climb 4

⊕ **Hook** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 1d12 + 7 damage, and the target is pulled 1 square.

Rending Hooks (standard; at-will)
The shadow hook horror makes two hook attacks, each at a -2 penalty. If both hooks hit the same target, the hook horror deals an extra 1d12 damage and the target can be grabbed.

Bite (minor 1/round; requires a grabbed target; at-will)
Targets a creature the shadow hook horror has grabbed; +20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage.

Fling (standard; recharge ⚅)
+19 vs. Fortitude; 2d12 + 7 damage, and the target slides 3 squares and is knocked prone.

Shadow Cloak (minor; requires activation in an area of dim light; encounter)
The shadow hook horror becomes invisible until the end of its next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Athletics +18
Str 24 (+13) **Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 16 (+9)
Con 25 (+13) **Int** 3 (+2) **Cha** 12 (+7)

If a PC proves too difficult to fight, a shadow hook horror flings it aside in favor of another target.

Delaying if it would act before its soldier allies, the eye of frost emerges from its position and takes up another. It chooses a place where it can maximize both the number of PCs it can see and the number of allies between it and the PCs. When it suspects it might become bloodied, the beholder moves away from its allies and toward the PCs to let loose *frost arcs*. The next turn, it favors *telekinesis ray* to free itself from would-be melee attackers.

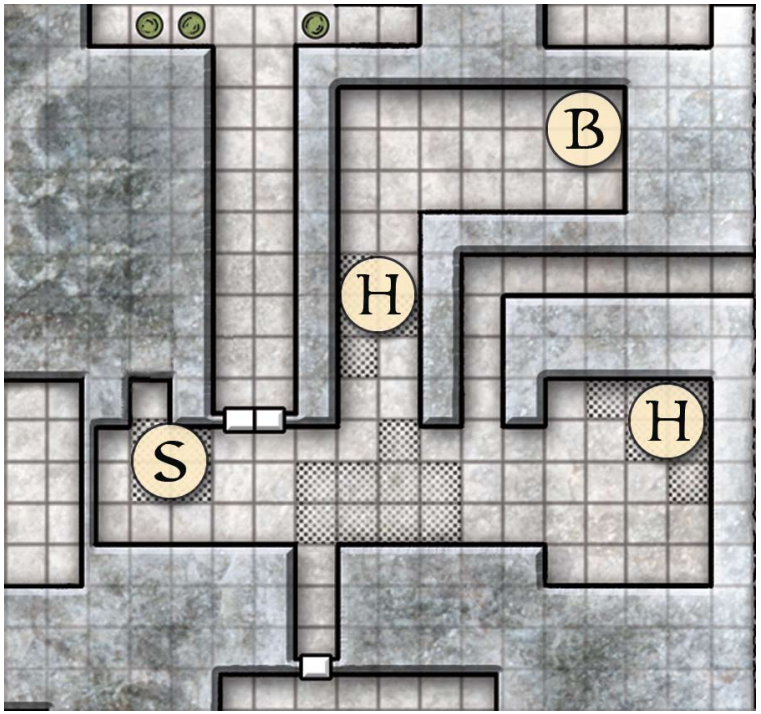
The other monsters consider the eye of frost their leader because Malachi raised them with it. They protect the eye at all costs.

Beholder Eye of Frost (B)	**Level 13 Elite Artillery**
Large aberrant magical beast	XP 1,600
Initiative +10	**Senses** Perception +13; all-around vision, darkvision
Eyes of the Beholder aura 5; at the start of each enemy's turn, if that creature is within the aura and in the eye of frost's line of sight, the eye of flame uses one random *eye ray* power against that creature.	
HP 204; **Bloodied** 102; see also *fiery burst*	
AC 26; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed fly 6 (hover)	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
+18 vs. AC; 2d6 damage.	
✈ **Central Eye** (minor; at-will)	
Ranged 5; the target gains vulnerable 10 cold, and any attack that deals cold damage to the target also deals ongoing 5 cold damage (save ends both).	
✈ **Eye Rays** (standard; at-will) ✦ see text	
The eye of frost can use up to two *eye ray* powers (chosen from the list below), at least one of which must be a *frost ray*. Each power must target a different creature. Using eye rays does not provoke opportunity attacks.	
1—Frost Ray (Cold): Ranged 8; +17 vs. Fortitude; 2d4 + 6 cold damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the eye of frost's next turn.	
2—Telekinesis Ray: Ranged 8; +17 vs. Reflex; the target slides 3 squares and is knocked prone.	
3—Freeze Ray: Ranged 8; +17 vs. Will; the target is restrained (save ends).	
✧ **Frost Arcs** (when first bloodied) ✦ **Cold**	
Close burst 2; +17 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 6 cold damage, and the target is immobilized.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Deep Speech
Str 10 (+6)	**Dex** 19 (+10)	**Wis** 15 (+8)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 12 (+7)	**Cha** 22 (+12)

Features of the Area

Secret Door: A secret door (Perception DC 24 to locate from this side) opens into the Malachi's chambers (area 20). It's locked (Thievery DC 25 to open; Athletics DC 25 to break).

Shadow Fog: The Shadowfell bleeds into the natural world in the spaces marked with crosshatching, creating areas of roiling darkness. Bright light adjacent to a square of shadow fog makes that square dim light instead of darkness.



Nessus Shrine

Encounter Level 14 (5,000 XP)

Setup

2 oblivion wraiths (O)
Sword wraith (S)
4 shattered wraiths (W)

Characters who fail to approach this area with stealth (Stealth DC 20) or who bring visible light attract the undead in this area. The undead still lurk within sarcophagi. Do not place any of the monsters until the PCs can see them.

When the PCs enter the northern tomb, read:

Arranged against every wall here are sarcophagi. Their lids are carved to resemble tieflings, each with his or her tail wrapped around his or her body. In some cases, the carving features stone hands reaching up from the lid. A sensation of unnatural pressure pervades the room.

When the PCs enter the southern shrine, read:

It's clear this room is an unholy place—against the eastern wall is an altar on which stand two statues of nude succubi holding up human infants toward a many-pointed star wrought from a blood-red metal and embedded in the ceiling. Along the north and south walls is a row of concave depressions stained with a tarry substance.

Arcana or History DC 25: *The symbol is that of the Wrights of Nessus, an order of diabolists from the days of Bael Turath.*

All the wraiths appear as dark spirits of vaguely humanoid shape.

2 Oblivion Wraiths (O) **Level 14 Brute**
Large shadow humanoid (undead) XP 1,000

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision
Nihil (Necrotic) aura 2; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 10 necrotic damage and cannot spend a healing surge until the start of its next turn.
HP 116; **Bloodied** 58; see also *death blast*
Regeneration 10 (if an oblivion wraith takes radiant damage, regeneration doesn't function until the end of its next turn)
AC 26; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 24
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic, insubstantial
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing; see also *shadow glide*

⊕ **Nihil Strike** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 2; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the oblivion wraith is invisible to the target until the end of the oblivion wraith's next turn.

⸸ **Obliviate** (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 2; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and ongoing 15 necrotic damage and a -2 penalty to saving throws (save ends both).

Death Blast (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +15 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target loses two healing surges.
Miss: Half damage, and the target loses a healing surge.

Shadow Glide (move; encounter)
The oblivion wraith shifts up to 6 squares.

Spawn Wraith
Any humanoid killed by an oblivion wraith rises as a free-willed oblivion wraith at the start of its creator's next turn, appearing in the space where it died (or in the nearest unoccupied space). Raising the slain creature (using the Raise Dead ritual) does not destroy the spawned wraith.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +18
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 10 (+7)
Con 16 (+10) **Int** 10 (+7) **Cha** 18 (+11)

Tactics

The wraiths attack stealthily to gain surprise and/or combat advantage. Along with the sword wraith, the oblivion wraiths strike at the party's front line. They then use shadow glide to take up positions that grant combat advantage and allow them access to softer targets. The oblivion wraiths also do so with the goal of placing most of the PCs within the *nihil* aura. In this case they ignore opportunity attacks to spread the destruction of the aura. In any case, oblivion wraiths ignore possible opportunity attacks to attack chosen targets. The sword wraith instead relies on phasing to move through objects and around the PCs.

Shattered wraiths split up to come at the PCs from varying angles. They also use *shadow glide* to move among the PCs, making targeting them with area attacks difficult.

These undead fight until destroyed.

Sword Wraith (S) **Level 17 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP 1,600

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
HP 90; **Bloodied** 45
Regeneration 10 (if the sword wraith takes radiant damage, regeneration is negated until the end of the sword wraith's next turn)
AC 30; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 32
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic, insubstantial;
Vulnerable 10 radiant (see also *regeneration* above)
Speed fly 8 (hover); phasing; see also *shadow glide*

⊕ **Shadow Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+20 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).

⸸ **Death Strike** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**
The sword wraith shifts 4 squares and makes a melee basic attack, dealing an extra 2d8 necrotic damage on a hit.

Combat Advantage ✦ **Necrotic**
The sword wraith deals an extra 2d6 necrotic damage against any target it has combat advantage against.

Shadow Glide (move; encounter)
The sword wraith shifts 6 squares.

Spawn Wraith
Any humanoid killed by a sword wraith rises as a free-willed sword wraith at the start of its creator's next turn, appearing in the space where it died (or in the nearest unoccupied space). Raising the slain creature (using the Raised Dead ritual) does not destroy the spawned wraith.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +20
Str 14 (+10) **Dex** 24 (+15) **Wis** 12 (+9)
Con 18 (+12) **Int** 11 (+8) **Cha** 24 (+15)

4 Shattered Wraiths (W)	Level 16 Minion Lurker
Small shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 350 each
Initiative +18	**Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
HP 1; a minion never takes damage from a miss	
AC 31; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 28	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing	
⊕ **Shatter Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+19 vs. Reflex; 5 necrotic damage, and the target gains vulnerable necrotic 5.	
Shadow Glide (move; encounter)	
The shattered wraith shifts 6 squares.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** –
Skills Stealth +19	
Str 4 (+5) **Dex** 23 (+14)	**Wis** 15 (+10)
Con 15 (+10) **Int** 6 (+6)	**Cha** 20 (+13)

Features of the Area

Altar: The altar is a low obstacle. A creature can move onto or off of the altar as if moving into difficult terrain. Succeeding on a DC 20 Athletics check (10 with a running start) allows the creature to ignore this requirement.

Concave Depressions: These are merely wells to hold incense and tinctures used in summoning rituals. The substance in them is the harmless remains of such components.

Sarcophagi: The sarcophagi are all fashioned from stone and act as low obstacles for determining cover. A creature can clamber atop a sarcophagus as a move action or as part of another move with a DC 30 Athletics check (15 with a running start).

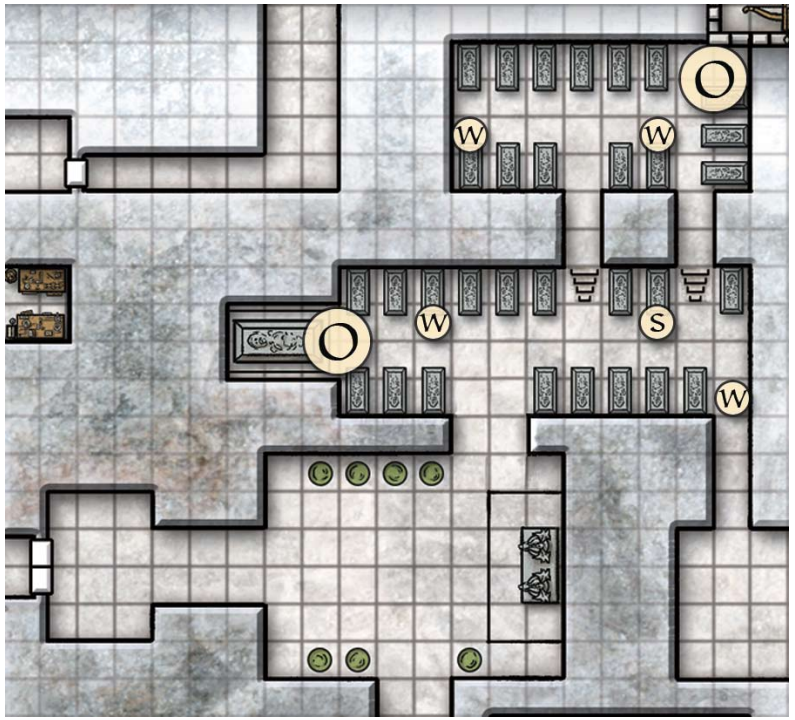
Stairs: Leading between two levels of the tomb, these stairs are gradual.

Statues: The succubus statues are 8 feet tall (Athletics DC 15 to climb). They act as blocking terrain for determining cover.

Treasure: This area contains two treasure parcels.

Conclusion

Surviving undead act on the lingering feeling that this is their fortress, and that the citadel has been compromised. They spill out of the chamber after the encounter, moving room by room, attacking anyone they find. They don't necessarily pursue the PCs directly if the PCs flee.



Bleeding Universe

Encounter Level 17+ (8,000+)

Setup

Malachi (M)
True Orrery (shown on map)
Volarn (V is where he arrives)
Kaorti fallen (+1,000 XP per fallen)

Regardless of when the PCs arrive, Malachi has just completed the hideous ritual and placed the *Tear of Ioun* in the orrery.

When the PCs open the door, read:

A massive, spinning orrery dominates this chamber, a mess of arms, orbs, and other odd protrusions. Hovering in the center of the machine is a black stone about the size of a fist. It pulses with green light that spills out from fractures marring its surface. Above the entire apparatus, you see a black rip in reality—a portal that writhes with darkness and motes of painful light.

In front of the device is a black-robed man with wispy hair. He turns to you, revealing a distorted face, two eyestalks emerging from his eye sockets. He opens his mouth to loose a shriek of outrage as his fingers start twitch with the casting of a dire spell.

Arcana DC 25: *The portal leads to the Far Realm!*

Perception DC 20: *Energy is coursing from the portal into the Tear of Ioun and the surrounding room.*

At the start, the PCs must contend only with are Malachi and the *Tear of Ioun*. The stone itself is invulnerable to damage, and you should let the players know this when they see it unharmed by attacks that include it. Each round the portal remains open, more enemies emerge from the Far Realm to attack the PCs.

Round 1: Malachi
Round 2: Volarn
Round 4, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15: Kaorti fallen

When Volarn arrives, read:

A massive violet tendril with weird musculature rips through the portal. Its end spews out a humanoid form wrapped in glistening sheets of dark resin. Violet skin wriggling with tendrils is exposed here and there. The creature's black eyes are also exposed, weeping thick oil.

"Well you have done, Malachi. Kill these wretches so the others may come forth," it says in a rough hiss.

"Volarn!" Malachi howls with adoration.

The other Kaorti arrive in a similar fashion (if they arrive at all).

Malachi **Level 16 Elite Controller**
Medium aberrant humanoid, human XP 2,800

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision
HP 314; **Bloodied** 157
AC 30; **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28
Saving Throws +2; see also *distortion field*
Speed 6; climb 6 (spider climb)
Action Points 1

⊕ **Disrupting Claws** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target regains only half the number of hit points granted by healing powers (save ends).

✻ **Psychic Assault** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Area burst 1 within 10; targets enemies; +18 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 7 psychic damage.

✧ **Distortion Field** (standard; sustain minor; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Conjunction, Psychic, Zone**
Close burst 2; a rippling field of energy causes disturbing reality distortions; enemies that start their turns in the zone take 5 psychic damage and -2 to defenses until the start of their next turn. The distortion field moves with Malachi. While the field persists, Malachi gains +5 to checks to escape a grab and +5 saving throws against the immobilized, restrained, and slowed conditions. *Sustain Minor:* The zone persists.

✧ **Unraveling Blast** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 3; +18 vs. Will; 2d10 + 7 psychic damage, and ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends). If the target has created any effect that has a duration (save ends, until end of turn, until end of encounter) or can be sustained, that effect ends. Miss: 1d10 + 7 psychic damage and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Mindbending Jaunt (move; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Teleportation**
Malachi teleports 5 squares. Malachi can choose a creature that he starts or arrives adjacent to, forcing that creature to make a melee basic attack against another adjacent creature as a free action.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +20, History +20
Str 11 (+8) **Dex** 12 (+9) **Wis** 9 (+7)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 24 (+15) **Cha** 21 (+13)
Equipment robes, orb, keys to trapdoor in area 4, the secret door in area 14, the door to area 18, and the secret doors in area 19/20 and 20/22.

True Orrery **Level 15 Elite Blaster**
Trap XP 2,400

Within the whirling arms of the orrery, the Tear of Ioun *pulses with sickly light, sending arcs of distorting energy coursing through the room.*

Trap: At the beginning of combat, the *Tear if Ioun* rolls initiative and begins attacking.

Perception

✦ **DC 18** A character notices fissures appearing in the *Tear of Ioun,* as if it can't contain the energy flowing into it for long. Success grants +2 to the Arcana check.

Arcana

✦ **DC 23** The character knows that hurling the *Tear of Ioun* into the Far Realm is likely to destroy the stone. It won't be able to contain the energy, but it is likely invulnerable to other attacks.

Initiative +10

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee** 1
Trigger: When a creature starts its turn or moves adjacent to the orrery
Target: The triggering creature
Attack: +20 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares (random direction) and knocked prone.

Attack ✦ Necrotic, Psychic

Standard Action **Close** burst 3
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: +18 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 5 necrotic and psychic damage, and one of the following effects from the warping influences (examples of alterations in parenthesis; roll 1d12; save ends all):

1	Dazed (hallucinations, disorientation, pain)
2	Ongoing 10 necrotic damage (body oozing blood)
3	Blinded (eyes disappear, delusions)
4	Slowed (leg withers, pain, disorientation)
5	-2 to attack (arm withers, squealing in ears)
6-7	Harmless but disturbing appearance change
8	-2 to defenses (dizziness, distorted vision)
9	Knocked prone (fainting, feet wither)
10	Immobilized (bones soften, floor grabs you)
11	Ongoing 10 psychic damage (screaming in mind)
12	Can't move closer to orrery (fear)

Any of these effects end instantly if the *Tear of Ioun* is thrown into the Far Realm portal.

Countermeasures

✦**Acrobatics** (part of a move action; DC 25) A character who has enough movement can tumble into the orrery's space to its center.

✦**Arcana** (standard action; trained only; DC 19) The character siphons energy from the eldritch machine, slowing it. Until the end of the character's next turn, the orrery takes -2 to attack rolls.

✦**Athletics** (standard action; DC 24) A character uses brute strength to stop the orrery's mad spinning, causing it to damage itself, dealing 30 damage or providing an opening for another PC, granting +4 to that character's check to move into the orrery's space. You take -2 to defenses while doing this.

✦**Athletics** (part of a move action; DC 25) A character who has enough movement can jump into the orrery's space to its center.

✦**Thievery** (standard action; trained only; DC 24) You work to jam the machine, dealing 30 damage or providing an opening for another PC, granting +4 to a subsequent Acrobatics check to move into the orrery's space. You take -2 to defenses while doing this.

✦ A character in the orrery's center can remove the *Tear of Ioun* from the orrery as a standard action. The portal to the Far Realm remains open until the *Tear of Ioun* leaves the orrery's space. It then closes at the end of the remover's next turn. If the PCs throw the *Tear of Ioun* through the portal, the artifact is destroyed. It cannot otherwise be destroyed.

✦A character can attack the orrery (Defenses 29; 250 hp). Destroying the orrery disables the portal at the end of the destroyer's next turn, but the orrery explodes when this happens:

Attack ✦ Psychic

Standard Action **Close** burst 10
Targets: All creatures in burst
Attack: +18 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 damage plus 2d10 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Volarn **Level 16 Elite Artillery (Leader)**
Medium aberrant humanoid, kaorti XP 2,800

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 246; **Bloodied** 123
AC 28; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Resist 10 acid, 10 psychic
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)
Action Points 1

Ribbon Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+19 vs. AC; 4d4 + 4 damage, and ongoing 15 damage (save ends).

Mind Knives (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +21 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage.

Twisting Orb (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +21 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is stunned until the end of Volarn's next turn.

Mind Warp (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic, Teleportation**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +20 vs. Will; 2d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target slides 2 squares. Volarn can teleport anywhere in the burst.

Out of Nowhere (move; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic, Teleportation**
Volarn teleports 6 squares and makes one *mind knives* attack while teleporting. He has combat advantage against his target and deals an extra 5 psychic damage.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +19, Insight +12, Religion +19

Str 10 (+8)	**Dex** 18 (+12)	**Wis** 8 (+7)
Con 21 (+13)	**Int** 22 (+14)	**Cha** 24 (+15)

Equipment resin armor, ribbon dagger

Kaorti Fallen	Level 14 Skirmisher
Medium aberrant humanoid	XP 1,000
Initiative +15	**Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 145; **Bloodied** 72	
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28	
Resist 10 acid and 10 psychic	
Speed 7, climb 4 (spider climb)	
⊕ **Ribbon Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+21 vs. AC; 2d4 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Twisting Ray (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Psychic**	
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Will; 1d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).	
Combat Advantage	
The Kaorti fallen deals an extra 2d6 damage to creatures it has combat advantage against.	
Mind Slide (move action; recharge ⚅)	
The Kaorti fallen can shift 3 squares, including through an enemy's space. It must end its shift in an unoccupied space. It doesn't provoke opportunity or immediate action attacks for shifting this way.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +18, Intimidate +17, Stealth +18	
Str 12 (+8)	**Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 8 (+6)
Con 17 (+10)	**Int** 18 (+11) **Cha** 20 (+12)
Equipment resin armor, ribbon dagger	

Tactics

Malachi opens with *distortion field*, then uses *mind-bending jaunt* to put the orrery between himself and as many PCs as possible. He isn't afraid to teleport to the ceiling or the tops of shelves, where he can climb. Once there, he employs *psychic assault*. He sustains the *distortion field* as long as he can, moving only when he must so he can lay down as much damage as possible and delay the PCs. He husbands his action point to make a spectacular series of actions when he really needs to do so. Malachi tries to save *unraveling blast* to help end effects that threaten him or his allies, but once he is bloodied, he is willing to utilize the potent attack simply to deal damage. When down to 50 hit points or so, Malachi flees, abandoning Volarn and the Kaorti. If you decide to include it in possible treasure, Malachi has a scroll of Linked Portal (680 gp) that he uses to teleport to a location of your choosing—if he eludes the PCs.

Volarn protects the orrery and the *Tear of Ioun* to give his Kaorti cohorts the time they need to escape the Far Realm. He favors as targets those PCs who are or seem likely to start tampering with the orrery. He employs *out of nowhere* to take up a position overlooking the orrery from the platform, he employs *twisting orb* on his preferred targets. If numerous foes threaten the orrery, Volarn uses *mind warp* on the area. He keeps mobile by teleporting, climbing, and moving, evading pursuers and vexing the PCs' efforts against the orrery.

The Kaorti fallen engage the PCs with melee attacks. They work for flanking, and they fight to protect the orrery and Volarn.

Having spent too long in the Far Realm only to be killed when they finally escape, each Kaorti, including Volarn, quits the battlefield when reduced to 35 or fewer hit points. They flee down the closest passage.

Development

Despite the opportunity attacks the orrery can make for the PCs moving adjacent to it in the attempt, the PCs might manage to make it to the *Tear of Ioun* and dislodge the stone from the eldritch machine. Any time the *Tear of Ioun* is dislodged from the orrery, the device stops spinning and the portal closes within the next round. If the PCs throw the *Tear* through the collapsing portal, they reverse the corrupted relic's effect as described in the true orrery statistics. Since this encounter is so challenging, entertain any good ideas the players have. For example, snatching the stone and putting it inside a *bag of holding* might close the gate and stop the orrery, although it doesn't end existing effects from the orrery's attacks like destroying the *Tear* does.

Features of the Area

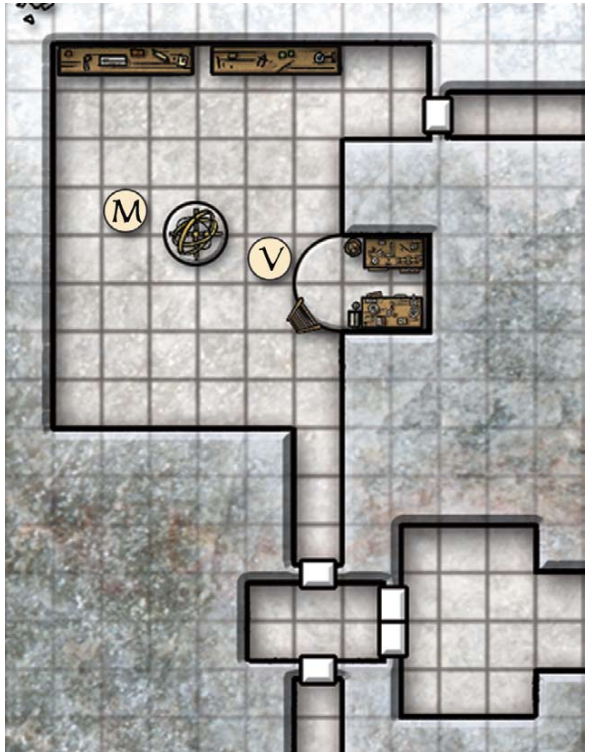
Illumination: The *Tear of Ioun* fills the room with bright light.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 30-feet high.

Platform: A ladder leads up to this raised floor. It takes 3 squares of movement to reach top.

Shelves: An assortment of mundane tools and parts litter the shelves, which are 10 feet high (Athletics DC 15 to climb).

Treasure: Parts of the orrery and items Malachi has here make up three treasure parcels.



New Monsters

This adventure introduces a few new monsters.

Icewight

The combination of extreme cold, dark history, and proximity to the Shadowfell produces icewights.

Icewight **Level 13 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (cold, undead) XP 1,600
Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 254; **Bloodied** 127
AC 27 (29 while shifting); **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 24
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 cold (if the wight takes cold damage, it gains regeneration 5 until it takes fire or radiant damage, or until the end of the encounter), 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 5 fire, 5 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8; ice walk
Action Point 1
⊕ **Blightfire Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
+18 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 cold damage, and ongoing 5 cold and necrotic damage. If this attack hits a creature taking ongoing cold or necrotic damage, the icewight also drains a healing surge. The icewight can drain only one healing surge per turn in this way.
ǂ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
The icewight makes two blightfire claw attacks.
Icy Slip (minor or move; at-will)
The icewight can shift 1 square as a minor action or 4 squares as a move action. It gains +2 to AC while shifting.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +17
Str 20 (+11) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 15 (+11) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 19 (+10)

Icewight Tactics

An icewight hurls itself at its enemies, sliding around them to gain access to targets taking ongoing cold or necrotic damage. It uses its action point to finish off a foe with another *double attack*.

Icetomb Wight **Level 13 Soldier**
Large natural humanoid (undead) XP 800
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74
AC 32; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 27
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 cold (if the wight takes cold damage, it gains regeneration 5 until it takes fire or radiant damage, or until the end of the encounter), 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 5 fire, 5 radiant
Speed 6; ice walk
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is marked (save ends).
ǂ **Freezing Grab** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Reach 2; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is grabbed. If the icetomb wight uses this power on a target it has already grabbed, that target loses a healing surge.
ǂ **Encase in Ice** (standard; requires a grabbed target; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Targets the creature the icetomb wight is grabbing; +18 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is no longer grabbed but is restrained and takes ongoing 10 cold damage (save ends both), and it is knocked prone.
Aftereffect: The target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 cold damage (save ends both).
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+10) **Wis** 20 (+11)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 12 (+7)

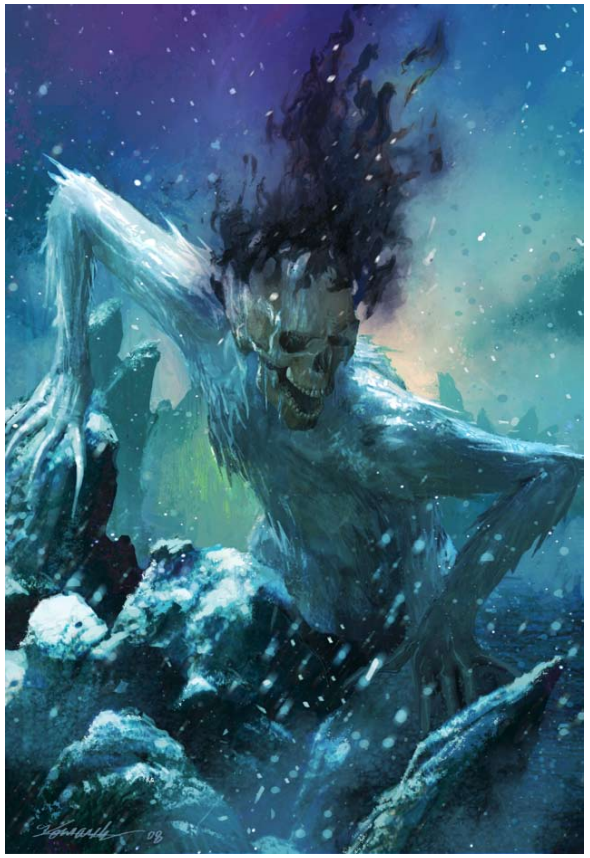
Icetomb Wight Tactics

As fearless an icewight, an icetomb wight enters combat without heed for its own safety. It grabs an adversary, drains that foe of a healing surge, then encases the enemy in ice to prevent escape and to grant itself and its allies combat advantage.

Icewight Lore

A character knows the following information with a Religion check.

DC 18: Icewights arise from the bodies of depraved folk who died in frigid places touched by shadow. Such a creature ever hungers for warmth and life, and the soul it can never reclaim. Some develop such a thick covering of ice that the ice becomes an extension of the creature's body.



Encounter Groups

Icewights are found in frozen environs as well as in the company of other creatures that have power or influence with the undead.

Level 13 Encounter (XP 4,800)

✦ 1 mummy lord (level 13 elite controller)
✦ 2 icewights (level 13 elite skirmisher)

Kaorti

The Kaorti were priests of Ioun who took their quest for knowledge into the Far Realm. They came back as something other than human.

Kaorti Fallen	**Level 14 Skirmisher**
Medium aberrant humanoid	XP 1,000
Initiative +15	**Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 145; **Bloodied** 72	
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28	
Resist 10 acid and 10 psychic	
Speed 7, climb 4 (spider climb)	
Ribbon Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+21 vs. AC; 2d4 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Twisting Ray (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Psychic**	
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Will; 1d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).	
Combat Advantage	
The Kaorti fallen deals an extra 2d6 damage to creatures it has combat advantage against.	
Mind Slide (move action; recharge ⚅)	
The Kaorti fallen can shift 3 squares, including through an enemy's space. It must end its shift in an unoccupied space. It doesn't provoke opportunity or immediate action attacks for shifting this way.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +18, Intimidate +17, Stealth +18	
Str 12 (+8)	**Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 8 (+6)
Con 17 (+10)	**Int** 18 (+11) **Cha** 20 (+12)
Equipment resin armor, ribbon dagger	

Kaorti Fallen Tactics

A Kaorti fallen likes to surprise its foes. It opens from a stealthy position or distance with *twisting ray*, then engages foes in melee. It uses mind slide and other forms of movement, such as climbing across ceilings, to keep combat advantage.

Kaorti Skybleeder	**Level 14 Brute**
Large aberrant magical beast	XP 1,000
Initiative +12	**Senses** Perception +10; all-around vision, darkvision
Acidic Mist (**Acid**) aura 1; a creature in the aura takes 5 acid damage at the start of its turn.	
HP 168; **Bloodied** 84	
Regeneration 5 (if the skybleeder takes fire or force damage, its regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)	
AC 26; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 25	
Resist 10 acid and 10 psychic	
Speed 6, fly 6 (hover)	
Claw (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 1d6 + 7 damage.	
Skybleeder Fury (standard; at-will)	
The skybleeder makes two claw attacks, or three claw attacks at -2 to each attack roll.	
Lashing Tentacles (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Acid**	
Close burst 2; +15 vs. Reflex; 1d4 + 7 acid damage (3d4 + 7 acid damage against a target the skybleeder is grabbing), and the target is pulled 2 squares and grabbed. A skybleeder can grab up to three targets.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Deep Speech
Str 24 (+14)	**Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 6 (+5)
Con 18 (+11)	**Int** 6 (+5) **Cha** 18 (+11)

Kaorti Skybleeder Tactics

After moving close to numerous enemies to better employ its aura, a Kaorti skybleeder uses *lashing tentacles* to grab a few foes. It then continues to grab those it can while clawing or using *skybleeder fury*. A skybleeder likes nothing better than to slay a foe grasped in its acidic tentacles.

Kaorti Thrall	**Level 14 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium aberrant humanoid	XP 250
Initiative +16	**Senses** Perception +6; darkvision
HP 1; a minion never takes damage from a miss	
AC 28; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 23	
Resist 10 acid and 10 psychic	
Speed 6, climb 4	
Ribbon Dagger (standard; at-will)	
+18 vs. AC; 7 damage.	
Mind Shift (minor; at-will)	
The Kaorti thrall shifts 1 square. It doesn't provoke opportunity or immediate action attacks for shifting this way.	
Combat Advantage	
The Kaorti thrall deals an extra 3 damage to foes it has combat advantage against.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Deep Speech
Str 18 (+11)	**Dex** 25 (+14) **Wis** 8 (+6)
Con 22 (+13)	**Int** 8 (+6) **Cha** 15 (+9)
Equipment resin armor	

Kaorti Thrall Tactics

Kaorti thralls madly rush into battle, often dropping from high places. They then carefully circle their enemies to distract and deal more damage with combat advantage.

Kaorti Lore

A character knows the following information with a Dungeoneering check.

DC 18: Legends say the Kaorti were once worldly mortals who chose to explore the Far Realm. Now they are part of a mutated breed corrupted by the ages they have spent in the Outside. They retain humanoid shape, but their forms are alien.

DC 23: Kaorti secrete a dark resin that they use to make weapons and armor. Most Kaorti wield ribbon daggers, thin blades capable of severing limbs in one stroke. They wear suits of resin to protect themselves from the discomfort they experience in the world and the Far Realm. Supplementing their cruel armaments are advanced psychic powers that can vary widely.

Some Kaorti grow so deformed and bloated that they become inhuman monsters with multiple clawed appendages and eyes. These creatures weep acidic mist and trail acidic tentacles. Humanoid Kaorti sometimes ride these monstrosities, which they call skybleeders.

DC 25: Kaorti take prisoners and slaves. They bind their captives in resin and spend days spilling biting and infusing the victims. After a time, the captives go mad, and with insanity come the physical changes that make them new Kaorti or Kaorti thralls.

Encounter Groups

Kaorti are few in number, so they work alongside other creatures susceptible to their demented influence. They also join other powerful aberrant creatures in mad plots.

Level 14 Encounter (XP 5,950)

- ✦ 3 Kaorti fallen (level 14 skirmisher)
- ✦ 1 Kaorti skybleeder (level 14 brute)
- ✦ 3 Kaorti thralls (level 14 brute)
- ✦ 1 destrachan far voice (level 15 artillery)

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is a freelance designer who has had a hand in many 4e titles, including the *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide, Draconomicon™ I: Chromatic Dragons, Manual of the Planes®, P2: Demon Queen's Enclave™, Martial Power™, Player's Handbook® 2, Eberron® Campaign Guide, Eberron Player's Guide, Divine Power™*, and numerous *D&D Insider™* articles. One could say he's a D&D® fan. Robert lives in Tennessee with his wife and army of feline robots.

A Real Skill Challenge

BY MIKE MEARLS
Illustration by Raven Mimura

For this month's installment, here's the skill challenge I've been talking about so much. The skill challenge represents the difficulty in traveling around Suderham, a city ruled by a band of foul slave traders known as the Slave Lords. The PCs might need to enter the city in order to free someone from the Slave Lords' clutches, slay a particularly powerful villain, or otherwise take an active step to disrupt an evil plot.

After the skill challenge are some design notes explaining my thoughts behind it.

Using the Skill Challenge

Use this skill challenge whenever the characters need to move through town. There are four quarters in the city: the military quarter, the wealthy quarter, the thieves' quarter, and the official quarter. To kick things off, I've created a menu of basic options that the players can choose from. Here's the list:

Travel in Your Current Quarter: You can move through a quarter using Athletics, Stealth, or Streetwise. Your current location determines the skill DCs. Using this option takes 2d10 minutes. If you succeed on your check, you arrive at your destination (assuming you know where you are going). If you fail, you accrue a failure.

Travel to a Different Quarter: Moving between quarters is tricky, because the borders between quarters are heavily patrolled and long, wide avenues between them make sneaking or leaping from rooftop to rooftop difficult. Moving between quarters requires Diplomacy, Intimidate, or Streetwise. Traveling between quarters takes an additional 1d10 minutes (3d10 altogether). If you fail, you accrue two failures.

Find Directions: You can take a chance on finding directions. You spend 2d10 minutes asking around (or finding someone who knows where your destination is). You can use Diplomacy and Streetwise for this option. If you succeed, you learn how to get to your destination and arrive there if it is in your current quarter. Otherwise, you need to travel to that quarter and then move within it. If you fail, you accrue a failure.

Gather Information: You can spend some time ferreting out rumors using Bluff, Diplomacy, and Streetwise. Success allows you to learn a rumor, while a blown check accrues a failure. It takes an hour to hit the local pubs and find any rumors.

Party Skill Checks

As the characters travel through town, it is important that they all make an effort to keep a low profile. When the PCs take one of the actions above, each PC in the group must make a separate skill check. The group, as a whole, must have more successes than failures in order to succeed overall. Otherwise, the group fails (including on a tie).

The PCs can each use a different skill, provided each skill is allowable for that action. Each PC can also aid one other PC. One PC can receive aid from more than one ally.

During combat, the PCs can choose to flee and make a pursuit check during the turn of the PC with the highest initiative. That PC, and the rest of the characters, forego their turns to run. This approach is a little abstract, but it is easier to manage than conducting the chase on the combat grid (of course, you can do that if you wish).

Experience

This is a level 9 skill challenge. At the end of the adventure, award the PCs XP for defeating a level 9 encounter (400 xp each).

Pursuit

If the PCs are chased by guards or any other NPCs, use the following simple rules for pursuit. Each PC must make an Athletics (to outrun pursuit), Bluff (to create a disguise), Stealth (to hide), or Streetwise (to find a shortcut or other difficult-to-follow route) check, using the appropriate DC for the quarter. If a majority of PCs succeed, they escape. Otherwise, the PCs are cornered and must fight their pursuers. Use the guidelines given below for the guard random encounter to determine the repercussions of a fight.

You can also allow a PC to improvise a skill. Use DC 14, 19, or 24, depending on how clever and feasible the idea is.

There is no set endpoint to this skill challenge. Either the PCs evade notice and find what they are after, or the city slowly turns against them.

Random Events

Life in the big city is full of surprises, and Suderham is no exception. Whenever the PCs take an action as part of this skill challenge, roll a d20 and consult the table for their current quarter. The PCs might avoid any complications, they might suffer a penalty (or a bonus) to the skill check made as part of the challenge, or they might need to make a few checks to avoid a potentially dangerous situation.

If the PCs fail a check made as part of a random event, they do not suffer a failure for the skill challenge unless the event states otherwise.

The Price of Failure

Failing skill checks draws attention to the PCs, putting the town guard on a higher level of alert. Armed patrols increase in strength and frequency. The secret police send out agents to track down the PCs. Eventually, if the PCs are foolish or unlucky, Suderham becomes an armed camp that is almost impossible to move in.

There is no set endpoint to this skill challenge. Either the PCs evade notice and find what they are after, or the city slowly turns against them. Factors external to the skill challenge, such as a deadline to

Effects of Failures

# of Failures	Ongoing Effect
1-2	No effect
3	The town guard schedules more patrols. Increase the DC of all Athletics and Stealth checks by +2.
4	The secret police become more active in questioning townsfolk. Increase the DC of all Diplomacy and Streetwise checks by +2.
5	Guard reserves called into duty. Random encounter results of 5 to 10 become guard patrols in the military, wealthy, and official quarters.
6	The guards and secret police become more active. Increase all check DCs by an additional +2.
7	High level of alert, with guards actively searching from house to house. Each time the PCs take a short rest in a building or alley in town, roll 1d20. On 16 or higher, the PCs encounter a guard patrol. During an extended rest, a guard patrol encounter occurs on a roll of 10 or higher.
8+	The town is in a state of combat readiness. All DCs increase by an additional +4 and all random encounters are replaced with guard encounters.

Random Events	
1-5	No event
6	The PCs encounter a merchant who offers them 2 gp each to help unload his cart. If they accept, the party must make a DC 19 Athletics check to unload his fragile goods. If they succeed, the merchant offers them a ride. Once, at a time of their choosing, they can arrange to travel in the city from this quarter to any other without making skill checks.
7	A spy seeking to help free a slave notices the PCs. With a successful Diplomacy check (DC 24), the group gains access to the network of liberators in the city. The Streetwise DC for this quarter becomes 14, or 9 if it is already 14. If the PCs fail, or if they accrue three more failures after this encounter, the spy suspects them of being turncoats. Roll two dice and take the higher result when rolling for random events while the PCs are in this quarter.
8	A group of slaves tries to escape. The PCs can help them (Stealth DC 19 to avoid detection), help capture them (Athletics DC 19), or do nothing. If the PCs assist the slaves and succeed, the next time they fail a check to travel in the city, a group of slaves who heard of the PCs' valor provide a distraction and cancel the failure. If the PCs fail to help them, they suffer a failure. If the PCs capture the slaves, they gain a +2 bonus on all skill checks with guard patrols if they succeed but suffer a -5 penalty on all checks against slaves and those sympathetic to them whether they succeed or fail.
9	A gang of hobgoblin mercenaries picks a fight with a guard patrol on the street in front of the PCs. The PCs can jump into the fight or do nothing. If they help the hobgoblins, on a d20 roll of 15 or higher, any hobgoblin patrols ignore them for the next week. If they help the humans, the same applies to human patrols. They suffer a ¬-5 penalty on skill checks against patrols of the type they opposed for that same time period. Killing any combatants automatically gives the PCs two failures.
10	A group of drunken off-duty soldiers tries to pick a fight with the PCs. Bluff or Intimidate scares them off (DC 19). On a failed check, the guards attack (4 human guards, MM page 162). If the PCs defeat the guards, they gain a +2 bonus on all Intimidate checks in this quarter. If the PCs kill any guards, they immediately suffer three failures. They suffer no drawbacks for beating guards unconscious (brawls are common here; the guards end up in the brig).
11	A cart loaded with goods topples over, blocking the street. The PCs must make another check to travel through this quarter.
12	A thief runs past the PCs, with a shopkeeper close behind. The PCs can stop the thief (Athletics DC 19) or ignore him. If they ignore him, the shopkeeper curses at them and attracts a guard patrol. If they catch the thief, the shopkeeper buries them with praise. The next time the PCs are pursued by guards in this quarter, they can hide in the shopkeeper's business and automatically escape detection.
13	The PCs come across an old building. A History check (DC 19) allows them to note that it was once a temple of the god of greed and should have a secret meeting chamber in the back. If the PCs are chased in this quarter, they can make Stealth checks with a +5 bonus by hiding in that chamber.
14	A horde of rats emerges from a nearby sewer grate, throwing the street into chaos. Each PC must use Athletics to avoid the rats (DC 19). On a failed check, a PC suffers 1d10+5 damage. A PC who inspects the grate sees that, while it is too narrow for a humanoid to fit through, it does open to a wide tunnel. A successful History check (DC 19) allows the PCs to find a nearby entrance to the sewer tunnels. From now on, the PCs can use the tunnels to travel in this quarter without making skill challenge checks. When they use the tunnel, though, a PC must make an unassisted History check (DC 19) to plot the correct path. On a failure, the PCs encounter monsters that lurk in the sewers. Create an encounter or pit the characters against 1d3 otyughs (MM page 211).
15+	Guard patrol. The PCs must make a party skill check to avoid guards. Roll 1d20 to determine what type of patrol was encountered.
	1-9 **Hobgoblin Mercenaries:** 1d6+1 hobgoblin soldiers (MM page 139)
	Athletics DC 14, Bluff DC 19, Diplomacy DC 24, Intimidate DC 19, Stealth DC 14
	The hobgoblins are poorly paid and undisciplined. They are eager for a fight (thus the high Diplomacy DC) but are inattentive as they patrol (allowing low Athletics and Stealth DCs).
	10+ **Humans:** 2d4 human guards (MM page 162)
	Athletics DC 19, Bluff DC 14, Diplomacy DC 19, Intimidate DC 24, Stealth DC 19.
	An Insight check (DC 19) reduces either Diplomacy or Intimidate by 5 (determine at random) as the PC notes the guards' moods, either eager to move on or easily cowed. The human guards are thorough in their work but usually seek any excuse to avoid a fight. They are well paid, and dead men can't spend their gold at the local pub.
Failure: If the PCs blow their party check, they sustain a failure and the guards try to arrest them. They can fight or flee. If the PCs fight, they suffer three additional failures if they kill any guards. At the end of each round, roll 1d20. On 16 or higher, another guard patrol arrives on the scene. On each round after the first, apply a cumulative +2 modifier to this check.	

find a kidnapped noble, stand as their biggest goals. The skill challenge is the context in which the adventure takes place.

The effects of the table are cumulative. If the PCs manage to avoid gaining any failures over the course of a day, roll 1d20. On 10 or higher, remove one failure from their total. If the PCs accrue five failures, they suffer all the drawbacks listed for that many failures and the levels below it.

The guards rarely enter the squalid thieves' quarter. Crumbling old buildings, flop houses, run down taverns, and other seedy establishments dominate this quarter, along with tenements filled to overcrowding.

On the other hand, in a big, interconnected social web like a city, failure breeds failure. Each time the PCs accrue a failure, immediately roll on the random event table. The rolled event arises directly from the circumstances of their failure.

MILITARY QUARTER

The military quarter features barracks, armories, and slave quarters. It lacks any taverns, inns, and similar establishments. Folk here tend to keep to themselves. They are either laborers at work or guards on or off duty. The PCs are likely to land in trouble faster here, but most people leave them alone.

Guardsmen here are usually off duty and looking to avoid trouble. Taking a gentle approach with Diplomacy is the best route. Intimidate checks are likely to be taken as a challenge.

Athletics DC: 19
Diplomacy DC: 14
Intimidate DC: 24
Stealth DC: 19
Streetwise DC: 19
Bluff DC: 19
History DC: 24
Insight DC: 19

OFFICIAL QUARTER

The official quarter is home to governmental buildings, temples, and warehouses that store trade goods. The guard maintains heavy patrols in this area. There is a +5 modifier to all random event rolls in this quarter.

The guards in this quarter are on high alert, making Stealth a difficult skill to use. Athletics is relatively easy, as the tallest, most ornate buildings in town are found here.

Athletics DC: 14
Diplomacy DC: 19
Intimidate DC: 19
Stealth DC: 24
Streetwise DC: 19
Bluff DC: 24
History DC: 19
Insight DC: 19

THIEVES' QUARTER

The guards rarely enter the squalid thieves' quarter. Crumbling old buildings, flop houses, run down taverns, and other seedy establishments dominate this quarter, along with tenements filled to overcrowding.

The thugs and criminals of this quarter have little use for social niceties. Diplomacy works poorly here. Streetwise offers easy access to dives that the guards avoid, side alleys, and other ways to keep out of sight.

Athletics DC: 19
Diplomacy DC: 24
Intimidate DC: 19
Stealth DC: 19
Streetwise DC: 14
Bluff DC: 19
History DC: 19
Insight DC: 19

WEALTHY QUARTER

The slave lords and other rich merchants of the city make their homes in this quarter. It is the second-most heavily patrolled area, behind the official quarter. The wealthy quarter hosts sprawling mansions with well-tended grounds, high-end taverns and inns, and other establishments that cater to the upper class. The broad boulevards have plenty of trees, gardens, statues, and other decorations.

Streetwise offers little utility here, as the broad avenues and sprawling estates make this quarter of the city the least urban in character of Suderham. In comparison, a group that uses Stealth has an easy time of it. The guards make frequent patrols, but the mansions provide many hiding spots. Many of them

are walled, surrounded by lush gardens, and ornamented with other flourishes that provide plenty of hiding spots.

Athletics DC: 19
Diplomacy DC: 19
Intimidate DC: 19
Stealth DC: 14
Streetwise DC: 24
Bluff DC: 19
History DC: 19
Insight DC: 19

DESIGN NOTES

I had a lot of fun putting this skill challenge together. It made me want to run adventures in Suderham, and it also prompted me to think more in-depth about the city, its structure, and how the quarters differ. If you have played or read the Slavelords series, you might have noticed a few alterations I made to the city. The original modules were designed for tournament play and thus needed less detail and depth than I need for an extended campaign.

This skill challenge is very detailed and comprehensive. To be honest, I was worried that it went too far astray from what most people are doing. I decided, however, that it was best to stick with something I'm using in my campaign rather than making up something from scratch. More on that later.

As with any skill challenge, this one relies heavily on a DM to bring it to life. You don't have the luxury of a monster's attack powers providing color and action for the scene. Instead, it's up to you to draw detail and create a compelling scene. Still, I tried to provide guidelines for each skill check and each area to make it easier to translate the action from the page to the table.

As a designer, that's the hardest part of skill challenge design. I'd like to make something that's both easy to run and detailed enough that any DM can run it cold, but I wonder if that's actually possible. The more detail I add, the more a DM has to work with—which also means more material to read, study, and apply.

I added the rules for party skill checks to make sure that everyone was engaged in the challenge. It's important to note that the party check usually allows each PC to choose a skill.

I added the rules for party skill checks to make sure that everyone was engaged in the challenge. It's important to note that the party check usually allows each PC to choose a skill. Forcing everyone to use the same skill makes for a swingier result, because the players have both luck on dice rolls and the vagaries of the party's class and race composition to deal with. A party with a lot of low Strength scores, for example, can find itself in trouble when Strength checks are the only option.

The random event table is my favorite part of the skill challenge. My goal was for DMs to build on the narrative and insert recurring NPCs and locations into the game via the events. The shopkeeper that you angered can turn up later as the guy who could give you a ride, were he inclined to like you, and so forth. When I run this skill challenge, I'll keep a handy list of one-sentence NPCs to fill in details.

The event table serves to keep things interesting, especially since the PCs might enter this challenge a dozen or more times during their sojourn in the city. Fresh twists help build the narrative and keep both you and the players on your toes.

Finally, the scaling penalties for failure were built to create a sense of paranoia and rising tension. I was tempted to add a second random element to it, such as treating the PCs as if they had 1d4 extra failures per day to represent slave revolts, trouble in town, and other random circumstances that could affect them.

NEXT MONTH

That wraps up this major skill challenge. How about YOUR skill challenge? For next month, I'll build a skill challenge based on someone's request. Send your ideas to dndinsider@wizards.com with Ruling Skill Challenges in the subject line. If we get a challenging idea, the editors will pick one for me to design.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Lead Designer for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. His recent credits include H1: *Keep on the Shadowfell*™ and *Player's Handbook® II* (v.3.5).

Love Me Some Evil

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland

It's true, I do. I think that's why I'm a Dungeon Master. I get to wallow away the hours coming up with the despicable acts of psychopathic monsters and depraved plans of nihilistic villains. It's pure joy. And I've always been like this. I remember once, back in the days of yore, when I was in high school, my father was puzzled as to why all my friends would spend a sunny, summer day around the game table, hooting and hollering about dragons, gnolls, and illithids. Finally he asked one of my players—a rather athletic fellow named Aaron—why in heck do you come over every weekend to roll dice and push around toy soldiers on my dining room table instead of playing football, baseball, or chasing girls?

Aaron's answer: "Your son is the most diabolical bastard I've ever met."

That's right. It's good to be bad, baby!

Every once in a while, though, evil can't be confined to one side of the screen. Players get a hankering to play evil characters. It could be just one player or it could be the entire group, but it's bound to happen. It can catch even an experienced Dungeon Master off guard. After all, we assume throughout almost all of *Dungeons & Dragons* that when you play a character, you're portraying a hero fighting against the forces of evil and chaos. At first blush, it seems that just one evil character can throw a monkey wrench into the whole works. But I've played evil characters (I'm playing a paladin of an evil god in one of my current lunchtime games here at Wizards), and I have let players play evil characters in my home game. I've even run entire groups of evil characters in a campaign. Back in the beginning of the Xen'drik Expeditions organized play program, I was the guy who decided to make a dark faction (the Cabal of Shadows, originally designed by Keith Baker especially for the campaign and expanded by the faction master, adventure designers, and the many players who brought it to life). D&D is a big game. It's robust and flexible enough to take on all comers. With the right DM and the right players, evil characters can be fun. But before you start dabbling with the dark side, there are some things you should know.

When to Say Yes to Evil, and When to Say No

If you have decided to run an evil campaign, the first thing to do is examine your own motivations honestly. If you've decided to run an evil campaign because you have a great campaign hook or you think it would be neat and interesting way to play D&D, those are fine motivations. The first thing you should do is float the idea by your players to get their reaction. While actors or storytellers may take to the idea, delighting in new avenues to flex their creative muscle, explorers and watchers may not. The latter two types of players tend to play the game to escape the hum-drum of everyday activity, and they are often invested in the game's core assumptions. If all of your players are not into your plans, it may be best to go back to the drawing board.

While it is your game, the best D&D games flourish in atmospheres where the DM is telling the story she wants to tell and the players are entirely engaged. There are few things that will kill that sense of engagement like a DM foisting the mantle of evil onto the unwilling. When you float the idea with your players, don't just listen to their words. Watch their body language and keep their personalities in mind. Casual players who are uncomfortable with the idea might feel pressured to agree as stronger personalities around the table rave about this flipping awesome idea! Control your own excitement and watch for slumped positions, worried eyes, and furrowed brows. Talk to those players one-on-one in an honest, non-judgmental, and straight-talking fashion. Get their real take on the idea, then either find ways to assuage their worries or realize they are not going to have fun playing this way.

Sometimes, the possibility of evil's taint entering you game will not come from you but from a player who asks the seemingly simple question, "so can I play an evil character?" The first question you should

shoot back is, "why do you want to?" Notice that I didn't say, "Why would you want to?" As the DM you absolutely have the prerogative to shut things down without discussion, but I always want to hear the player out. I think flawed characters are interesting and fun (they give the DM more hooks to pull on when making decisions about the campaign's story). I also think that bad men who have hearts of gold are interesting to play (which might tell you something about my personality). Lastly, I am a strong believer that both good and bad characters can add to the story and can work within a party. Yes, they create moments of tension. Yes they can be frustrating. But those tendencies can be focused into fun stories and interesting choices.

You know what isn't fun? Someone who wants to play evil (or even unaligned) because his idea of a good time is to pick the pockets and stab the backs of the other PCs! Not only should you say no to that player inequitably and immediately, you need to watch him like a hawk, because it's that kind of destructive streak that can really damage a campaign's longevity.

In the last analysis, whether to have evil slip over onto the player side of the screen is really up to you and your group's level of maturity and, more importantly, comfort. It's your job as DM to create stories and adventures that entertain and challenge ... to create those instances of fun that really make D&D shine. If you and your players think you can do that with evil characters, then go for it. If there is any doubt, shelve the idea.

With Great Evil Comes Great Responsibility

Whether or not you agree to let one person in the game play an evil character, or let everyone in the game play evil characters, you should absolutely have *the talk*. What's that? I like to call it the "don't be a jerk and don't be a baby" talk. It's a real, honest discussion about the tone of the game you are about to play. It's a verbal agreement to not let the nefarious actions of characters spill over into real-life arguments. It is the group realization that you are about to play something that will be challenging. It's going to be more work than a normal campaign.

You see, the real problem with evil characters in any campaign is that players identify with their characters. That's one of the fantastic things about D&D. During the rush of play, the lines between you and your character break down, you feel what your character feels emotionally (though thankfully, not physically), and you act on those emotions with an exhilarating sense of urgency. In a game with evil characters, everyone playing will want to take a few step backs from that emotional immediacy and roll with the punches—or there will be punches. Folks need to make an effort not to take the things that happen to their characters personally. That's good advice at all times, but even moreso when evil is involved. As the *Dragonlance* saying goes, "evil turns on itself." When there is evil in the party, at some point in the campaign, things get selfish. Characters will not only battle the monsters, they'll also end up competing against one another. This is fun provided that you and the players know what you're getting into and treat it as fun. As soon as it stops being fun, stop the game. Maybe not the campaign, but don't let an interesting storytelling experiment get in the way of a good time. In literature, evil may be the easy path to power, but when it comes to campaigns, it is a harder to maintain.

Running Dirty Rotten Scoundrels

So, how do you challenge evil characters? It's simpler than you'd think. Some of the design principles of D&D work in your favor. At its heart, D&D is a cooperative game. One of the greatest challenges of the game (after learning the rules) is figuring out how your character fits with rest of your party. This is true in combat and in roleplaying. The core assumption that you are playing a hero eases this learning curve, as the group wants to work together and everyone is pretty open about abilities and goals. Any DM worth his salt will craft encounters that require a group of PCs to work together in interesting, fun, and unexpected ways. Over the course of a campaign or even an adventure, you ramp up challenges to make sure that everyone in the group is, can, and will synergize their abilities.

Here's what's funny about running a group of evil characters—one of the greatest challenges they will face is learning how to work with each other. Evil characters, who are naturally selfish, untrustworthy, and interested chiefly in their own goals, typically don't want to work with one another unless they can gain personal advantage from it. Instead of building encounters that train them to work together to reach their goals, create encounters to challenge them to work together. The game stays basically the same, but the tone and the particulars change. Instead of rescuing princesses, you are capturing them for ransom. Instead of ridding a region of hobgoblin brigands, you are expanding wood cutting into the elven forest. Instead of defeating the rampaging red dragon, you are trying to talk her into attacking a citadel filled with paladins of Bahamut and then making off with her treasure while she's away. Basically, evil adventures are just different flavors of somewhat similar missions and adventure types.

Having only one evil character in a group can be a bigger challenge for the DM, especially if the evil

character is being played for the wrong reasons (see above). Ultimately, you need to trust the person playing the evil character not to ruin everyone else's fun. If you don't, there is no good reason to let that person do it. Even then, you must let that player know clearly that if they start ruining the fun for other people in the game, they'll have to rethink their character. With my evil character, I first asked my DM if it was OK, explained why I wanted to do it, and made sure that everyone was entertained by my character and his unorthodox solutions to problems ("Can't we just burn down the village?") which the group rarely employs. I realize that eventually my paladin will either be redeemed or will join the side of darkness and become the DM's new NPC, but the path he takes toward those competing destinations makes him fun to play ... and fun to play with.

What put me on the topic of evil for this month's column? Much of it arose from some letters in the mailbag, one of which came from a fella I'll call Unaligned Joe. Joe's problem is a little different because it springs up after the game has already started, so let's take a look at his situation and see what can be done.

THE MAILBAG

One of my players created a tiefling warlock and has created a background where his character is devoted to Asmodeus. Out of character, everyone at the table seems to get a chuckle at his roleplaying ability and antics, but I daresay in-game he's a bit over the top. He fearlessly attempts to convert everyone he encounters (everyone from priests of other faiths, nobility, to little children in city streets), including the PCs as well.

Some of his conversions have taken hold, and now the party is now divided in the middle between good and borderline evil alignments, and different religious interests. The cleric (and healer) has now cast aside his former faith and joined him with his dark pursuits, much to our paladin's chagrin. I'm having issues finding story hooks to keep the party together and keep things running without having his roleplaying ability overshadow everyone else's.

Please help!

-- Unaligned Joe

Since you are in the middle of your game, it's now too late to take into account a lot of the advice I've given above. If you are ever in this position again, make sure everyone is on board before this occurs. You'll save yourself a lot of heartache. At this stage, your real problem is finding a way to create group coherency within this crisis of faiths.

The wonderful thing about the particular brand of evil that's manifested in your game is its cosmic scope. I can see why a tiefling warlock winning over converts to Asmodeus is hard to take for a good paladin. There is, however, a really simple way to get him into the story that your tiefling player has woven with charm and guile. Maybe the paladin is part of this particular group for a reason, and that reason is the tiefling. Maybe his destiny is entwined with the tiefling. Maybe it's his job to contain and even subtly thwart this warlock's machinations. Maybe it is his ultimate destiny (epic?) to convert the warlock to the side of good. I see a strong and powerful hook here that can really engage the paladin and the warlock character. And it can all start with a visit from an angel....

The confusing (to me) thing about your dilemma is that I don't know whether it is just the conflict of alignment causing a problem in the group. Possibly the real problem is that the tiefling player has found a way to hog too much of the center stage with his (albeit entertaining) antics. It may be that your paladin player needs some story love and a couple of nights for his character to really shine and be the focus of (or at least an equal partner in) the story you group is building. I'm just guessing, but at least think about that when you consider new story hooks.

That's all for this month. Next month, I have a pretty full mail bag, so I think the entire column will be devoted to sifting through it and confronting real problems sent in by you. Don't let that dissuade you from sending in more questions and issues. Even when I don't respond to them directly, I love to read them, and keep the choicest ones (like this one) as inspiration for entire columns.

CLOG OUR MAILBOX!

Your game needs saving, or you have some game saving advice of your own? Drop us a line at dndinsider@wizards.com with the worlds Save My Game as your subject line. Maybe next month we'll talk about your problem or feature some bit of advice that comes from the mailbag.

You can also join the game saving conversation on our message boards, but piping in on the discussion of DM tips and tricks. Stephen makes it a point to visit and chat with those who agree and disagree with him.

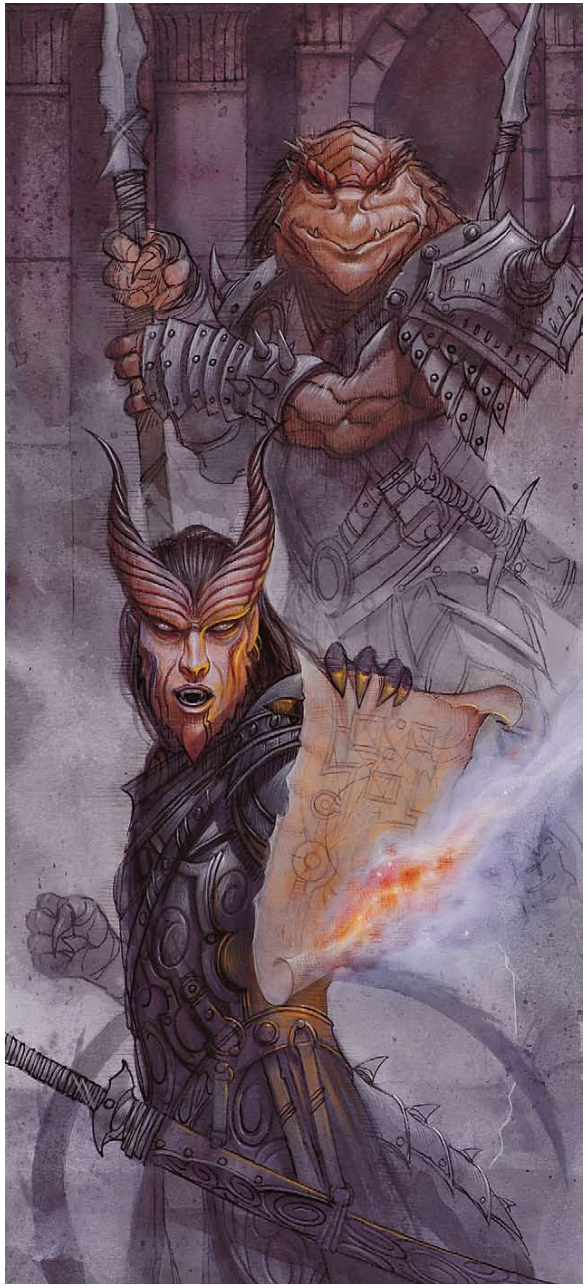
About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Once that RPGA® guy, Stephen is now a developer in RPG R&D where he doesn't create the traps... he just makes them deadlier. He also teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

To the Library!

by James Wyatt
Illustration by Wayne England



One of the questions I've heard people asking since the release of the 4th Edition rules in June is, "What do I do with all my old books?" Indeed, even around the Wizards of the Coast offices, we've been doing some rearranging to make room for 4th Edition books at our desks, and if the clearance shelves at my local Half-Price Books are any indication, a lot of you are doing the same thing. On the flip side, I've heard people express some resistance to buying 4th Edition books because they have such an extensive collection of 3rd Edition (or earlier) books and don't want to invalidate that collection by switching to the new edition.

I haven't yet cleared away any of my 3rd Edition books, though—and I still have my 1st Edition *AD&D Player's Handbook, Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* on the shelf above my desk. I keep shifting more books over to the shelves by the window, a little farther out of reach, but I'm not ready to get rid of anything just yet. Why not? Well, because I believe that the best answer to that question is, "Keep using them!" Whatever edition of the game you're playing, there's a lot of information in any *D&D* book that's perfectly usable and a great resource for your current game. The fact that I've made extensive use of the 3rd Edition sourcebook *Lords of Madness*, and I'm planning to use the 2nd Edition adventure *The Gates of Firestorm Peak* as the centerpiece of the campaign, is testament to that fact. In today's column, I want to broaden my perusal of my library in search of ideas for my campaign.

The Old: Classic Adventures

I mentioned near the beginning of this series that I don't like drawing dungeon maps. That makes even old adventures a great resource for use in my games. After spending some quality time with the adventures on my shelves, I've found several things that I can use as my campaign progresses.

I'm starting to worry about the immediate need for a good story and dungeon for my characters' first excursion into Greenbrier Chasm. (Last week, they encountered the Brier Haunt, successfully discerning that it wanted their help, and then they fought a carrion crawler I turned into a level 2 solo, but by this Friday I need to have a clearer idea where this dungeon is going.) So I pulled out some old adventures that I knew featured themes and monsters similar to what I want to do in Greenbrier.

I started with *Night Below*, the terrific Underdark boxed adventure from 1995. The great thing about *Night Below* is that it contains many small, more or less discrete cavern complexes and monster lairs that I could pick up and use throughout the characters' exploration of the chasm, when they reach appropriate levels. There's a grell nest I can use in their second foray into the chasm (which I penciled in for about level 9-11), a fun set of "caves of the slime lord" full of oozes, and a cavern shared by a behir and its rival, a shadow dragon. I might decide to incorporate the rockseer elves from that adventure into the campaign, as a foreshadowing of the Elder Elves whose work is featured in *The Gates of Firestorm Peak*. The aboleth city of Great Shaboath could also come in handy on the characters' third excursion into the chasm.

A couple of weeks ago, I was looking at the adventure *A Darkness Gathering*, published to support the 2nd Edition *Illithiad* book in 1998. I pulled it out again, and I'm thinking I might adapt some or all of that adventure—which features a cyst of mind flayers operating in a city shrouded in an unnaturally long winter—for a second trip to Silverymoon, perhaps just before the characters venture to Harrows Pass at the start of the paragon tier. I think it could work really well to lay some groundwork for the *Firestorm Peak* adventure.

I'd turn the reptile cult into a Far Realm cult, replacing the spirit naga with a dolgrim or similar low-level, aberrant monster.

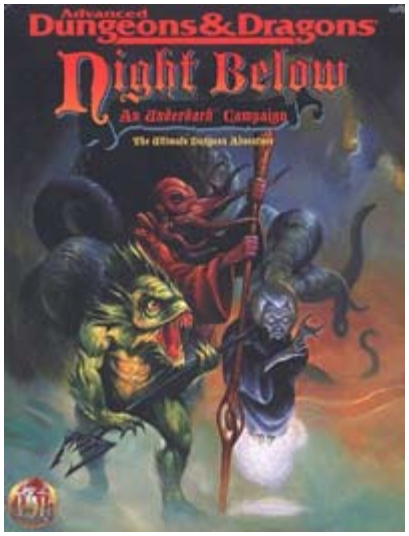
I also pulled out an adventure from 1982, Dungeon Module N1: *Against the Cult of the Reptile God*. It sparked a lot of ideas, but I'm not quite sure what to do with them. It's a low-level adventure set in the tiny village of Orlane, where the cult of a spirit naga has been kidnapping and brainwashing villagers. I thought about bringing it into play in Greenbrier, adding an element of intrigue to the characters' activity in their home village. I'd turn the reptile cult into a Far Realm cult, replacing the spirit naga with a dolgrim or similar low-level, aberrant monster. I could put the cult leader's dungeon right into the chasm, but I'm not sure that approach fits very well with what I had in mind for Greenbrier. I thought about instead using it in Tower Watch when the characters are level 4-5, or in Silverymoon a little later on, but nothing is clicking just yet. I think I'm going to put the *Cult of the Reptile God* in the idea file for now.

The New: Manual of the Planes

The campaign arc I sketched out back in episode 3 has one glaring flaw, as I look back at it: It doesn't account for the characters ever leaving the world and venturing into other planes. With *Manual of the Planes* in hand, I want to correct that oversight. Let's do some brainstorming:

In episode 9, I suggested that the ruined eladrin city of Cendriane, in the Feywild near Greenbrier, might have information about the Elder Elves who built the dungeon complex featured in *The Gates of Firestorm Peak*. *Manual of the Planes* gives a half-page description of Cendriane (page 42) that includes some monstrous inhabitants—giant spiders, fey panthers, displacer beasts, vicious dryads, and an eladrin vampire lord named Kannoth. Based on the levels of those monsters (9-14, except the fey panther down at level 4), I'm going to pencil in a trip to Cendriane after the second foray into Greenbrier Chasm, around level 11 or 12.

I suspect that the characters' trip through Harrows Pass could be enriched by drawing on the Shadowfell material in *Manual of the Planes*. I think that entering the pass might actually take the characters into the Shadowfell, and specifically into an area of Darklands (page 51) that impedes radiant powers and enhances necrotic attacks.



Linking Harrows Pass to the Shadowfell gets me thinking again about the keepers in *Manual of the Planes* (the monsters, found on page 134, as opposed to the organization of the same name I created for this campaign). The monsters are the peacekeepers or custodians of Gloomwrought, a city in the Shadowfell (page 57). I'd love to take the characters there—maybe the characters emerge from Harrows Pass into the peat bog that surrounds the city, called the Skins, and need to find their way from Gloomwrought back to the world before they can enter the Gates of Firestorm Peak. The beauty of that idea is that they can get some sense that the threat of Firestorm Peak is a threat to the Shadowfell as well, because (as I suggested earlier) that dungeon exists in the world, the Shadowfell, and the Feywild simultaneously.

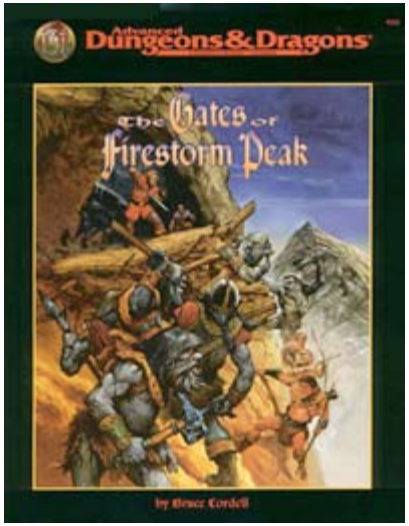
Maybe in Gloomwrought, the characters actually discover that there is some connection between the keepers and the Keepers. I need to mull that over.

Finally, *Manual of the Planes* gives me a nice hazard tied to the Far Realm that I can use when the characters explore the deepest reaches of Greenbrier Chasm—an entropic fissure (page 24). It's a pretty brutal hazard, appropriate for characters at such high level.

Other Resources

From the beginning, I've been pulling ideas from all over the place to build this campaign. Let's run down the list of my sources:

Lords of Madness: The 3rd Edition aberration sourcebook has lots of information about aberrant monsters, including lairs and mini-adventures. I've mostly drawn on the player material so far—the organizations described in Chapter 9. As I flip through the rest of the book, though, I see a lot more material I can draw on, starting with the aboleth miniadventure in Chapter 2. In 3rd Edition, aboleths were CR 7, which made this a good little adventure for about 5th-level characters. I could pretty easily create a solo or elite aboleth that's lower level than the paragon threats in the 4th Edition *Monster Manual*, making



this miniadventure usable as a side trek in the mid-heroic tier. The grell outpost in Chapter 6 would also fit right into Greenbrier Chasm.

The Gates of Firestorm Peak: This 1999 adventure has turned into the centerpiece of my campaign, dominating the paragon tier of my campaign arc. I've been working on spreading seeds from it into earlier adventures, laying the groundwork for the Elder Elves in the Feywild and putting an observatory at the top of the tower in Tower Watch so the characters learn about the comet. The adventure itself is full of duergar, troll mutates, and Far Realm horrors like the wyste—monsters I'll have fun adapting to 4th Edition when the time comes, and maybe using both before and after that adventure is over.

The adventure itself is full of duergar, troll mutates, and Far Realm horrors like the wyste—monsters I'll have fun adapting to 4th Edition when the time comes

Miniatures Handbook: I wrote up the mad slasher, a monster from this 2003 sourcebook, in my last column. (It's worth noting that I decreased its damage output significantly when it actually came into play. That might have been necessary just because the characters plunged into a second encounter before finishing the first, or it might have been a flaw with my monster design. More testing needed!) I'm sure I'll be using nothics, which also first appeared in this book, but they're already updated to 4th Edition rules in adventure P1.

The Speaker in Dreams: This adventure was one of the first projects I worked on after I joined the staff of Wizards of the Coast in 2000. I thought about using it as the basis for the characters' journey to Lake Town, but I think I might draw as much or more on Ari Marmell's "The Last Breaths of Ashenport" (in Dungeon #156). The adventure gave me a name for the aberrant horror that was bound beneath Greenbrier Chasm, as well as a cult–Those Who Hear—that the characters will encounter several times.

Dragon Forge: *Speaker in Dreams* isn't the only case where I've borrowed from other material I've written. The name and concept of the Depravation spreading from Greenbrier Chasm comes from the second novel in my *Eberron* trilogy. See page 107 for the excerpt. I'll be sure to work details from that passage into my description of the Depravation for the characters.

Twenty paces past the ruined wall, shattered cobblestones paved the forest floor. Plants sprouted up between the ancient stones, and a few trees—smaller than elsewhere in the forest—pushed the stones apart and buckled them with their spreading roots. Sevren slowed his pace, stooping every few paces to examine a fern or vine. Each time he bent down, his face showed more concern.

Soon the shifter stopped entirely, kneeling on the cobblestones and examining the underside of a pale, almost white fern.

"What is it?" Kauth asked.

Sevren yanked the fern from the ground and stood up. He held the plant out to Kauth, pointing at the leaves. Strange nodules covered them, purplish-white and pulsing faintly with life that struck him as distinctly not plantlike.

"We call it the Depravation," the shifter said. "It's the influence of the Realm of Madness. There's probably a portal somewhere in the ruins. Maybe still sealed—or mostly sealed. Possibly broken."

"You think there's a daelkyr here?" Kauth carefully kept the alarm from his voice, though it was written plain on the others' faces. Thousands of years ago, the alien world of Xoriat, called the Realm of Madness, had come close to the natural world—close in some abstract, metaphysical sense that, fundamentally, meant it was easier to cross from one world to the other. What had crossed from Xoriat into the world had given the Realm of Madness its name: tentacled horrors and deformed monstrosities much like the beings that had spilled out of the Soul Reaver's domain in the Starcrag Plain. But the rulers and makers of these monstrous aberrations were the daelkyr, deceptively humanlike beings of incredible power whose greatest skill lay in warping flesh according to their insane designs. With their gibbering hordes, they had devastated the goblin empire of Dhakaan before the druids known as the Gatekeepers had pushed Xoriat away from the world and sealed the portals the daelkyr had used. Even so, their influence still lingered, particularly in the western parts of Khorvaire.

"I suppose there could be, but I don't think it's likely. The Depravation would be stronger, more noticeable."

"What, then?" Zandar asked. He maintained his cocky smile, but Kauth could see the effort it required.

"Some weaker spawn of the daelkyr, I expect," Sevren said.

Kauth pointed at the fern. "So what are those nodules?"

"Eggs." Sevren used the sharp nail of one finger to pry one of the objects loose from the leaf. Tiny tendrils trailed behind it, sliding out of the fern. They seemed to writhe in the air before curling up close to the body of the egg.

Holding the tiny object gingerly between two fingernails, Sevren stooped to pick up a small piece of cobblestone. He laid the egg on the flat stone and pressed his nail into it. There was a barely audible squelch and a violet fluid oozed out. He picked at the shell, revealing a tiny maggot-thing, the same pale purple as the nodule. It was almost as large as the husk that held it, suggesting that it had been almost ready to hatch. Indeed, it pulsed with life and began to writhe as soon as the air touched its slimy skin, lifting one end toward Sevren's finger. With a snarl of revulsion, the shifter cut the larva in two. The halves continued squirming for a moment before falling still. Sevren stooped again and used the stone to grind the maggot against another cobblestone.

"What will those grow into?" Zandar asked.

"No idea. Probably some warped form of fly or beetle. A blood drinker or flesh eater."

"So are we continuing into the ruins?" Kauth asked. "Or circling around?" He glanced around at his three companions.

Zandar's revulsion was clear on his face—ironic, Kauth thought, considering the dark and twisted forces the warlock dealt with in practicing his magic. Vor's face was impassive, while Sevren looked grim.

The shifter set his jaw and spoke through clenched teeth. "Continuing."

Vor nodded, and Zandar looked off in the direction they had been walking.

"Until discretion trumps greed, we forge ahead," Zandar said. "I'm not letting flesh-eating flies dissuade me. At least, not before they've hatched."

Destroying these created monsters requires more than just whittling them down to 0 hit points; the characters effectively must undo the rituals that created them.

Old adventures and sourcebooks from every edition of the game, current books, and novels all provide ample resources you can use to help flesh out your campaign. I know that as far as I'm concerned, there's not a book on my shelf that's wasting space or useless to me, no matter what year it was published.

The Idea File: Heroes of Horror

That doesn't mean that every book is useful right now, though. The first 3rd Edition book I pulled off my shelf for inspiration was *Heroes of Horror*. I was thinking about the Depravation that's spreading from Greenbrier Chasm and wondering whether I might want to use the Taint system in that book (derived from the similar system in *Oriental Adventures* by way of *Unearthed Arcana*) to model the Depravation's effects on the player characters specifically. I ultimately rejected that idea. The Taint system works best, in my experience, if you're creating a real horror campaign, and a horror campaign requires buy-in from the players. Frankly, I don't think I'm going to get that buy-in for this campaign. I was reflecting the other day about the dynamics of a lunchtime game at the office—maybe something that few people outside of the Wizards of the Coast office have much interest in or experience with. But even with a two-hour session scheduled each week, I'm finding that it's hard to get as immersed in the game as I get even in a similar amount of time in my weekly Thursday evening game. Something about being at the office and on lunch break inhibits getting deeply engrossed in the game, and I think that makes this campaign not conducive to a horror atmosphere.

Flipping through the book, though, I got a lot of ideas for another campaign, perhaps the "Swords & Sorcery" campaign I outlined in my idea file episode. Aside from the taint rules, I found the discussion of campaign models (pages 51-52) particularly inspiring. A couple of them ("Death Is Only the Beginning" and "The Evil that Men Do") suggest a focus on human and humanoid monsters, making other monsters rare and very special—and usually found as minions of humanoid villains. I like the idea of my sword-&-sorcery world as a place where the great villains are human sorcerers dabbling in powerful, evil magic and summoning, creating, or animating monsters to do their bidding. Destroying these created monsters requires more than just whittling them down to 0 hit points; the characters effectively must undo the rituals that created them.

One of the particularly cool things about *Heroes of Horror* is that the first half of the book is almost rule-free. It's all about creating encounters, adventures, and campaigns that feature horror themes and flavor. That's just as useful in a 4th Edition game as it was in 3rd Edition, and I expect to draw on that material a lot in this campaign as well as my next one.

Next time, I'll look at the brand-new *Player's Handbook 2* as fodder for my campaign!

About the Author

James Wyatt is the D&D® Design Manager for Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying R&D. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*®. He was one of the designers of the *Eberron*® *Campaign Setting* and is the author of several *Eberron* novels.